MARCH
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# Adventure

Talbot Mundy
Barry Scobee
Charles Beadle
Robert Simpson
Captain Dingle
Stanton C. Lapham
E. O. Foster
Frank H. Shaw
Paul L. Anderson
Rolf Bennett
Thomson Burtis

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# He's Bound for the Frozen North

CAPTAIN DONALD B. MacMILLAN

CAPTAIN DONALD B. MacMILLAN was with the Peary expedition which reached the North Pole in 1909. And now he's headed North again, on what promises to be the most important polar expedition, from a scientific standpoint, ever undertaken.

The schooner Bowdoin, on which the success of the venture largely depends, was built by the Hodgdon Brothers, of East Boothbay, Me. Having heard that Captain MacMillan calls them "the best ship-builders in the world," I started out the other day to find out where they "learned their trade."

The first of the three brothers that I saw was Charles E. Hodgdon.

"My ancestors were ship-builders back to the time of my great-grandfather," he said. "Yet some twenty years ago, while employed by the Herreshoff Manufacturing Company, yacht-builders at Bristol, Rhode Island, I enrolled for an I. C. S. Complete Mechanical Course.

"To this day the reference books are by me, and I have frequent occasion to consult them. From my experience I cheerfully commend the I. C. S. to the attention of young men seeking dependable aid in getting ahead."

Twenty years ago William A. Hodgdon, the brother of Charles, was also working in the Herreshoff yards at Bristol, R. I. When Charles enrolled with the I. C. S., so did William, choosing the Course of Architecture. Says he: "I found the study helpful and retained all the books for reference. I am consulting them to this day."

There is still a third brother. When his two elder brothers were studying their I. C. S. courses he was playing in the sands. But now he, too, is studying the I. C. S. Course in Architecture. "My wife also intends enrolling for one of the I. C. S. courses," he said the other day. "I have been yacht-building since I was a kid, but I figure the more a man broadens through special study, the bigger man he's going to be."

Are these three Hodgdon boys exceptions? I should say not!

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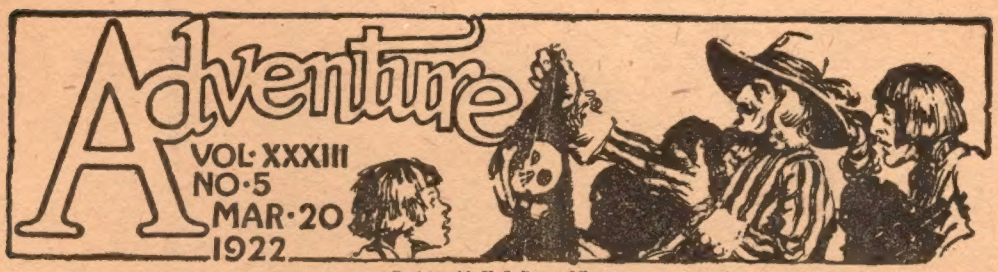


Registered in U. S. Patent Office

Published Three Times a Month by THE RIDGWAY COMPANY

J. H. GANNON, President — C. H. HOLMES, Secretary and Treasurer

Spring and Macdougal Streets - - New York City
6, Henrietta St., Covent Garden, London, W. C., England

*Entered as Second-Class Matter, October 1, 1910, at the Post-Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879.*

ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN, Editor

Yearly Subscription, $6.00 in advance — Single Copy, Twenty-Five Cents

Foreign postage, $3.00 additional. Canadian Postage, 90 cents.

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*MATTEO*, cast out upon the desert marches of Outremer, faces two hostile worlds. The Christian warriors of Jerusalem spurn him. The Saracens want his death. A tale of the time of Saladin. "A SON OF STRIFE," a three-part story by Arthur D. Howden Smith, begins in the next issue.

AROUND the Horn, Frisco-bound, sailed the dainty clipper, *Fancy Nan*, with Death for a passenger—and the desolation of open boats facing her crew. "THE FENCELESS MEADOWS," a complete novelette by Bill Adams, in the next issue.

HE WAS a horse-thief, but he drew the line at telling a lie, for he had in him a spark that might some day grow into a clear flame—and that once flared up enough to set an entire cowtown ablaze. "THE SPARK OF SKEETER BILL" is a complete novelette by W. C. Tuttle in the next issue.

*Other stories in the next issue are forecast on the last page of this one.*

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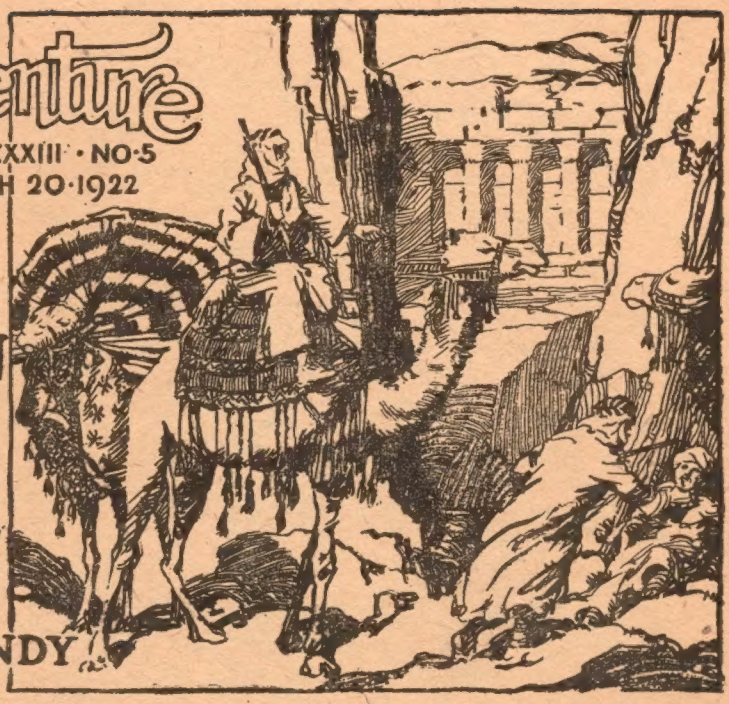
**Don't forget the new dates of issue for *Adventure*—the 10th, 20th and 30th of each month**

Adventure
VOL. XXXIII · NO. 5
MARCH 20 1922



# THE LION of PETRA

*A Complete Novel*

*by*

**TALBOT MUNDY**

*Author of "Barabbas Island," "The 'Iblis' at Ludd," etc.*

## CHAPTER I

*"Allah makes all things easy!"*

THIS isn't an animal story. No lions live at Petra nowadays, at any rate no four-legged ones; none could have survived competition with the biped. Unquestionably there were tamer, gentler, less assertive lions there once, real yellow cats with no worse inconveniences for the casual stranger than teeth, claws and appetites.

The Assyrian kings used to come and hunt near Petra, and brag about it afterward; after you have well discounted the lies they made their sculptors tell on huge stone monoliths after they got back home, they remain a pretty peppery line of potentates. But for imagination, self-esteem, ambition, gall and picturesque depravity they were children—mere chickens—compared to the modern gentleman whom Grim and I met up with A.D. 1920.

You can't begin at the beginning of a tale like this, because its roots reach too far back into ancient history. If, on the other hand, you elect to start at the end and work backward the predicament confronts you that there wasn't any end, nor any in sight.

As long as the Lion of Petra has a desert all about him and a choice of caves, a camel within reach, and enough health to keep him feeling normal, never mind whose camel it is, nor what power claims to control the desert, there will be trouble for somebody and sport for him.

So, since it can have no end and no beginning, you might define this as an episode—a mere interval between pipes, as it were, in the amusing career of Ali Higg ben Jhebel ben Hashim, self-styled Lion of Petra, Lord of the Wells, Chief of the Chiefs of the Desert, and Beloved of the Prophet of Al-Islam; not forgetting, though, that his career was not even supposed to amuse his victims or competitors. The fun is his; the fury other people's.

The beginning as concerns me was when I moved into quarters in Grim's mess in Jerusalem. As a civilian and a foreigner I could not have done that, of course, if it had been a real mess; but Grim, who gets fun out of side-stepping all regulations, had established a sort of semi-military boarding-house for junior officers who were tired of tents, and he was too high up in the Intelligence Department for anybody less

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than the Administrator to interfere with him openly.

He did exactly as he pleased, in that and a great many other matters—did things that no British-born officer would have dared do—because they are all crazy about precedent—but that they were all very glad to have Grim do, because he was a bally American, don't you know, and it was dashed convenient and all that; and Grim was a mighty good fellow, even if he did like sirup on his sausages.

The main point was that Grim was efficient. He delivered the goods. He was perfectly willing to quit at any time if they did not like his methods, and they did not want him to quit because there is nothing on earth more convenient for men in charge of public affairs than to have a good man on their string, who can be trusted to break all rules and use horse-sense on suitable occasion.

I had been in the mess about two days, I think, doing nothing except read Grim's books and learn Arabic, when I noticed signs of impending activity. Camel-saddles began to be brought out from somewhere behind the scenes, carefully examined and put away again. Far-sighted men with the desert smell on them, which is more subtly stirring and romantic than all other smells, kept coming in to squat on the rugs in the library and talk with Grim about desert trails and water and what tribal feuds were in full swing and which were in abeyance.

Then, about the fourth or fifth day, the best two camel-saddles were thrown into a two-wheeled cart and sent off somewhere, along with a tent, camp-beds, canned goods, and all the usual paraphernalia a white man seems to need when he steps out of his cage into the wild.

I was reading when that happened, sitting in the armchair facing Grim, suppressing the impulse to ask questions and trying to appear unaware that anything was going on. But it seemed to me that there was too much provision made for one man, even for a month, and I had hopes. However, Grim is an aggravating cuss when so disposed, and he kept me waiting until the creaking of the departing cart-wheels and the blunt bad language of the man who drove the mules could no longer be heard through the open window.

"Had enough excitement?" he asked me then.

"There's not enough to be had," said I, pretending to continue reading.

"Care to cut loose out of bounds?"

"Try me."

"The desert's no man's paradise this time o' year. Hotter than Billy-be- —— and no cops looking after the traffic. They'll shoot a man for his shoe-leather."

"Any man may have my shoes when I can't use 'em."

"Heard of Petra?"

I nodded as casually as I could. Everybody who has been to Palestine has heard of that place, where an inaccessible city was carved by the ancients out of solid rock, only to be utterly forgotten for centuries until Burkhardt rediscovered it.

"Heard too much. I don't believe a word of it."

"There's a problem there to be straightened out," said Grim. "It's away and away beyond the British border; too far south for the Damascus Government to reach; too far north for the King of Mecca; too far east for us; much too far west for the Mespot outfit. East of the sun and west of the moon, you might say. There's a sheikh there by the name of Ali Higg. I'm off to tackle him. Care to come?"

"When do we start?"

"Now, from here. Tonight from Hebron. I'll give you time to make your will, write to your lady-love, and crawl out if you care to. Ali Higg is hot stuff. Suppose we leave it this way: I'll go on to Hebron. You think it over. You can overtake me at Hebron any time before tonight, and if you do, all right; but if second thoughts make you squeamish about crucifixion—they tell me Ali Higg makes a specialty of that—I'll say you're wise to stay where you are. In any case I start from Hebron tonight. Suit yourself."

Any man in his senses would get squeamish about crucifixion if he sat long enough and thought about it. I hate to feel squeamish almost as much as I hate to sit and think, both being sure-fire ways of getting into trouble. The only safe thing I know is to follow opportunity and leave the man behind to do the worrying. More people die lingering, ghastly deaths in armchairs and in bed than anywhere.

So I spoke of squeamishness and second thoughts with all the scorn that a man can use who hasn't yet tasted the enmity of the desert and felt the fear of its loneliness; and

Grim, who never wastes time arguing with folk who don't intend to be convinced, laughed and got up.

"You can't come along as a white man."

"Produce the tar and feathers, then," said I.

"Have you forgotten your Hindustani?"

"Some of it."

"Think you can remember enough of it to deceive Arabs who never knew any at all?"

"Narayan Singh was flattering me about it the other day."

"I know he was," said Grim. "It was his suggestion we should take you with us."

That illustrates perfectly Grim's way of letting out information in driblets. Evidently he had considered taking me on this trip as long as three days ago. It was equally news to me that the enormous Sikh, Narayan Singh, had any use for me; I had always supposed that he accepted me on sufferance for Grim's sake, and that in his heart he scorned me as a tenderfoot. You can no more dig beneath the subtlety of Sikh politeness than you can overbear his truculence, and it is only by results that you may know your friend and recognize your enemy.

Narayan Singh came in, and did not permit any such weakness as a smile to escape him. When great doings are being staged it is his peculiar delight to look wooden. Not even his alert brown eyes betrayed excitement. Like most Sikhs, he can stand looking straight in front of him and take in every detail of his surroundings; with his khaki sepoy uniform perfect down to the last crease, and his great black bristly beard groomed until it shone, he might have been ready for a dress parade.

"Is everything ready?" asked Grim.

"No, *sahib*. Suliman weeps."

"Spank him! What's the matter this time?"

"He has a friend. He demands to take the friend."

"What?" I said. "Is that little —— coming?"

Two men in all Jerusalem, and only two that I knew of, had any kind of use for Suliman, the eight-year-old left-over from the war whom Grim had adopted in a fashion, and used in a way that scandalized the missionaries. He and Narayan Singh took delight in the brat's iniquities, seeing precocious intelligence where other folk denounced hereditary vice. I had a scar on my thumb where the little beast had bitten me on one occasion when I did not dare yell or retaliate,* and along with the majority I condemned him cordially.

"Who's his friend?" asked Grim.

"Abdullah."

Now Abdullah was worse than Suliman. He had no friends at all, anywhere, that anybody knew of. Possibly nine years old, he had picked up all the evil that a boy can learn behind the lines of a beaten Turkish army officered by Germans—which is almost the absolute of evil—and had added that to natural depravity.

"Let Abdullah come," said Grim. "But beat Suliman first of all for weeping. Don't hit him with your hand Narayan Singh, for that might hurt his feelings. Use a stick, and give him a grown man's beating."

"*Atcha, sahib.*"

Two minutes later, yells like a hungry bobcat's gave notice to whom it might concern that the Sikh was carrying out the letter of his orders. It was good music. Nevertheless, quite a little of the prospect was spoiled for me by the thought of keeping company with those two Jerusalem gutter-snipes. I would have remonstrated, only for conviction, born of experience, that passengers shouldn't try to run the ship.

"What shall I pack?" I asked.

"Nothing," Grim answered. "Stick a tooth-brush in your pocket. I've got soap, but you'll have small chance to use it."

"You said I can't go as a white man."

"True. We'll fix you up at Hebron. The Arabs have scads of proverbs," he answered, lighting a cigaret with a gesture peculiar to him at times when he is using words to hide his thoughts. "One of the best is—

" 'Conceal thy tenets, thy treasure, and thy traveling.'

"The Hebron road is not the road to Petra. We're going to joy-ride in the wrong direction, and leave Jerusalem guessing."

FIVE minutes later Grim and I were on the back seat of a Ford car bowling along the Hebron road under the glorious gray walls of Jerusalem; Narayan Singh and the two brats were enjoying our dust in another car behind us. There being no luggage, there was nothing to excite passing curiosity, and we were not

*See "Under the Dome of the Rock"— *Adventure*, Dec. 10, 1921.

even envied by the officers condemned to dull routine work in the city.

Grim was all smiles now, as he always is when he can leave the alleged delights of civilization and meet life where he likes it—out of bounds. He was still wearing his major's uniform, which made him look matter-of-fact and almost commonplace—one of a pattern, as they stamp all armies; but have you seen a strong swimmer on his way to the beach? A man who feels himself already in the sea, so that his clothes are no more than a loose shell that he will cast off presently? Don't you know how you see the man stripped already, as he feels himself?

So it was with Grim that morning. Each time I looked away from him and glanced back it was a surprize to see the khaki uniform.

The country, that about a week ago had been carpeted with flowers from end to end, was all bone-dry already, and the naked hills stood sharp and shimmering in heat-haze; one minute you could see the edges of ribbed rock like glittering gray monsters' skeletons, and the next they were gone in the dazzle, or hidden behind a whirling cloud of dust. Up there, three thousand feet above sea-level, there was still some sweetness in the air, but whenever we looked down through a gap in the range toward the Dead Sea Valley we could watch the oven-heat ascending like the fumes above a bed of white-hot charcoal.

"Some season for a picnic!" Grim commented as cheerfully as if we were riding to a wedding. "You've time to crawl out yet. We cross that valley on the first leg, and that's merely a sample!"

But it's easy enough to be driven forward in comfort to a new experience, never mind what past years have taught, nor what imagination can depict; if that were not so, no new battles would be fought and women would refuse to restock the world with trouble's makings. A reasoning animal man may be, but he isn't often guided by his reason, and at that early stage in the proceedings you couldn't have argued me out of them with anything much less persuasive than brute force.

We rolled down the white road into Hebron in a cloud of dust before midday, and de Crespigny, the governor of the district, came out to greet us like old friends; for it was only a matter of weeks since he and we and some others had stood up to death together, and that tie has a way of binding closer than conventional associations do.

But there were other friends who were equally glad to see us. Seventeen men came out from the shadow of the Governorate wall, and stood in line to shake hands—and that is a lengthy business, for it is bad manners to be the first to let go of an Arab's hand, so that tact is required as well as patience; but it was well worth while standing in the sun repeating the back and forth rigmarole of Arab greeting, if that meant that Ali Baba and his sixteen sons and grandsons were to be our companions on the adventure. They followed us at last into the Governorate, and sat down on the hall carpet with the air of men who know what fun the future holds.

Narayan Singh stayed out in the hall and looked them over. There is something in the make-up of the Sikh that, while it gives him to understand the strength and weaknesses of almost any alien race, yet constrains him more or less to the policeman's view-point. It isn't a moral view-point exactly; he doesn't invariably disapprove; but he isn't deceived as to the possibilities, and yields no jot or tittle of the upper hand if he can only once assume it. There was scant love lost between him and old Ali Baba.

"*Nharak said,** O ye thieves!" he remarked, looking down into Ali Baba's mild old eyes.

Squatting in loose-flowing robes, princely bred, and almost saintly with his beautiful gray beard, the patriarch looked frail enough to be squashed under the Sikh's enormous thumb. But he wasn't much impressed.

"God give thee good sense, Sikh!" was the prompt answer.

"Fear Allah, and eschew infidelity while there is yet time!" boomed a man as big as the Sikh and a third as heavy again—Ali Baba's eldest son, a sunny-tempered rogue, as I knew from past experience.

"Whose husband have you put to shame by fathering those two brats?" asked a third man.

Mahommed that was, Ali Baba's youngest, who had saved Grim's life and mine at El-Kerak.†

*Greeting!

†"The Adventure at El-Kerak"—*Adventure*, Nov. 10, 1921.

They all laughed uproariously at that jest, so Mahommed repeated it more pointedly, and the Sikh turned his back to consider the sunshine through the open door and the rising heat within. Suliman and the other little gutter-snipe proceeded to make friends with the whole gang promptly, giving as good as they got in the way of repartee and nearly starting a riot until Grim called Ali Baba into the dining-room, where de Crespigny was shaking up the second round of warm cocktails in a beer-bottle.

Ali Baba chose to presume that the mixture was intended for himself. The instant de Crespigny set the bottle on the table the old rascal tipped the lot into a tumbler and drank it off.

"It is good that the Koran says nothing against such stuff as this," he said, blinking as he set the glass down. "I have never tasted wine," he added righteously.

"Are the camels ready?" asked Grim.

"Surely."

"What sort are they? Mangy old louse-food, I suppose, that had been turned out by the Jews to die?"

"Allah! My sons have scoured Hebron for the best. Never were such camels! They are fit to make the pilgrimage to Mecca."

"I suppose that means that the rent to be charged for each old camel for a month is more than the purchase price of a really good one?"

"The camels are mine, Jimgrim. I have bought them. Shall there be talk of renting between me and thee?"

"Not yet. After I've seen the beasts. If they're as good as you say I'll pay you at the government rate for them per month."

"Allah forbid! The camels are yours, Jimgrim. For me and mine there will no doubt be a profit from this venture without striking bargains between friends."

Grim smiled at that like a merchant listening to a salesman. It is not often that you can tell the color of his eyes, but on occasions of that sort they look iron-gray and match the bushy eyebrows. He turned to de Crespigny.

"Have you finished the census, 'Crep?"

"Pretty nearly."

"Have you got Ali Baba's property all listed?"

"Yes."

"And that of his sons and grandsons?"

"Every bit of it that's taxable."

"Good. You hear that, Ali Baba? Now listen to me, you old rascal. When you complained to me the other day that there was no more thieving left to do in Hebron, I told you you're rich enough to quit, and you admitted it, you remember? You agreed with me that jail isn't a dignified place for a man of your years and experience."

"*Taib.** Jail is not good."

"But you complained that you couldn't keep your gang out of mischief."

"Truly. They are young. They have talent. Shall they sit still and grow fat like a pasha in the harem?"

"So I said I'd find them some honest employment from time to time."

"That was a good promise. Here already is employment. But you know, Jimgrim, they are used to rich profits in return for running risks. Danger is meat and drink to them."

"They shall have their fill this trip!" said Grim.

"*Taib.* But the reward should be proportionate."

"Government wages!" Grim answered firmly.

The old Arab smiled.

"Under the Turks," he answered, "the officer pocketed the pay, and the men might help themselves."

"D'you take me for a Turk?" asked Grim.

"No, Jimgrim. I know you for a cunning contriver—an upsetter of calculations—but no Turk. Nevertheless, as I understand it, we go against Ali Higg, who calls himself the Lion of Petra. Sheikh Ali Higg has amassed a heap of plunder—hundreds of camels—merchandise taken from the caravans; that should be ours for the lifting. That is honest. That is reasonable."

"Not a bit of it!" said Grim. "Let's get that clear before we start. I know your game. You've got it all fixed up between yourselves to stick with me until Ali Higg is *mafish*† and then bolt for the sky-line with the plunder. Not a bit of use arguing—I know. You shouldn't talk your plans over in coffee-shop corners if you don't want me to hear of them."

"Jimgrim, you are the devil!"

"Maybe. But let's understand each other. Your property in Hebron is all

*All right.
†Lit., nothing; corresponds to "na-poo" in army slang.

listed. We'll call that a pledge for good behavior. You and your men are going to have Government rifles served out to you that you'll have to account for afterward. Every rifle missing when we get back, and every scrap of loot you lay your hands on will be charged double against your Hebron property. On the other hand, if any camels die you shall be reimbursed. Is that clear?"

"Clear? A camel in the dark could understand it! But listen, Jimgrim."

The venerable sire of rogues went and sat cross-legged on the window-seat, evidently meaning to debate the point. If an Arab loves one thing more than a standing argument, it is that same thing sitting down.

"We go against Ali Higg. That is no light matter. He will send his men against us, and that is no light matter either. They are heretics without hope of paradise and bent on seeing hell before their time! Surely they will come to loot our camp in the dark. Shall we not defend ourselves?"

But Grim was not disposed to stumble into any traps.

"Does a loaded camel on the level trouble about hills?" he asked.

But Ali Baba waved the question aside as irrelevant.

"They come. We defend ourselves. One, or maybe two, or even more of Ali Higg's scoundrels are slain. Behold a blood-feud! Jimgrim and his friends depart for El-Kudz* or elsewhere; Ali Baba and his sons have a feud on their hands.

"Now a feud, Jimgrim, has its price! It would do my old heart good to see the blood of Ali Higg and his heretics, for it is written that we should smite the heretic and spare not. But we should also despoil him of his goods, or the Prophet will not be pleased with us!"

"That is the talk of a rooster on a dung-hill," Grim answered. "A rooster crows a mile away. Another answers with a challenge, but the camels draw the plow in ten fields between them. That is like a blood-feud between you and Ali Higg. Five days' march from here to Petra, and how many deserts and tribes between?"

"So much the easier to keep the loot when we have won it!" answered Ali Baba.

"There's going to be no loot!" said Grim.

"Allah!"

"Would you rather have me send back to Jerusalem for regular police?"

*Jerusalem.

"Nay, Jimgrim! That would be the end of you, for those police would bungle everything. You need clever fellows with you if you go to sup with Ali Higg."

"Well? Are you coming?"

"*Taib.* We are ready. But——"

"On my terms!"

"But the pay is nothing!"

"So is my pay nothing! This man"—he pointed to me—"gets no pay at all. Narayan Singh the Sikh gets less pay than a policeman."

"Then what is the profit?"

"For you? The honor of keeping your word. The privilege of making fair return for past immunity. Why aren't you and all your sons in jail this minute? Why did I invite you to come with me on this occasion? Because a man looks for friends where he has given favors! But if you consider you owe the Administration nothing for forgiving all past offences, very well; I'll look for friends elsewhere."

"As for the Administration, Jimgrim, may Allah turn its face cold! But you are another matter. We will come with you."

"On my terms?"

"*Taib.*"

You would have thought that settled it, especially as Ali Baba had already stated that he and his gang were prepared for the journey. But the East, that is swift to wrath, is very slow over a bargain; and it is a point of doctrine, besides, all the way from Gibraltar to Japan to keep an American waiting if you hope to get the better of him. Ali Baba settled down for a nice long talk; and you would have thought, to judge by Grim's expression, that he could ask for nothing better.

The old rogue wanted to know among other things who would have the task of cleaning rifles on the journey. It seemed that he was long on sanctity, and not allowed by his religion to touch grease in any shape or form. Grim satisfied him on that point. Narayan Singh should clean the rifles.

But that started him off on a new trail. He tried to see how much more he could impose on the Sikh, and suggested such matters as pitching tents, cooking, gathering firewood, cleaning pots and pans, leading the pack-camels, and a host of other necessary evils.

"I shall issue all needful orders to each man," Grim told him bluntly at last.

"And what is to be done to Ali Higg?"

"That remains to be seen."

"He is a devil with a cold face."

"So I'm told."

"He has more than a hundred armed men."

"I heard twice that number."

"And we shall be twenty?"

"Twenty."

"Oh well, Allah makes all things easy!"

But that was not the last word. There was still a custom of the country to be met and overcome.

"Are the camels watered?" Grim asked.

"Surely."

"Packs all ready?"

"All tied up—everything."

"You're all ready to start then?"

"*Inshallah bukra.*" *

"Tomorrow won't help me," said Grim. "We start tonight at sundown. I'll go with you and look the camels over now."

"But, Jimgrim, that is impossible. My son Mahommed's second wife is sick——"

"Leave him behind, then, to look after her."

"He will not consent to be left! Two of the camels are not paid for. The man comes in the morning for his money."

"Leave the money here for him with Captain de Crespigny. We start tonight."

"But what if the camels are not satisfactory?"

"I shall see about other ones at once in that case. There'll be time if we look them over now. We start tonight."

"I was thinking about some mules to carry an extra load or two."

"No. Don't want mules. Too hot for them. Besides, there's no time for changing the loads over. We start tonight."

"Tomorrow will be a better moon, Jimgrim."

"We want a full moon when we get to Petra. We start tonight. Come along; show me the camels."

"It is hot now. There is a bad stink in the stables. Better see them when it gets cooler."

"I'm going now. Are you coming with me?"

"*Taib.* I will show them to you. They are good ones. They will make you proud. Better give them another night's rest, though, Jimgrim."

"Come along. Let's look at them."

"One has a little girth-gall that——"

"Ali Baba, you old rogue, we start tonight!" said Grim.

## CHAPTER II

*"Trust in God, but tie your camel!"*

DO YOU believe in portents? I do. Whenever in the East the first two statements that a man has made in my presence, and that I have a chance to test, prove accurate I go ahead and bet on all the rest. I don't mean by that that because a man has told the truth twice he won't lie on the third and fourth occasion; for the East is like the West in that respect, and usually seeks to turn its virtue into capital. But in a land where, as old King Solomon, who knew his crowd, remarked "all men are liars," you must have some sort of weather-vane by which to guide your natural optimism, so I settled on that one long ago.

Ali Baba had said there was a bad stink in the camel stables. A natural expert in hyperbole, he had not exaggerated in the least. And he had said that they were good camels; it was true. You did not need to be a camel expert to know those great long-legged Syrian beasts for winners. They looked like the first pick of a whole countryside, as he maintained they were—twenty-five of them in one string, representing an investment at after-war prices of the equivalent of five or six thousand U. S. dollars.

"Who has been looted to pay for these?" asked Grim.

"Allah! You have put an end to our proper business, Jimgrim. What could we do? We took our money and bought these camels, thinking to take a hand in the caravan trade."

Grim looked into the old rogue's eyes and laughed.

"In the land I come from," he said, "a capitalist with your predatory instincts would pay a lawyer by the year to tell him just how far he could safely go!"

"A *wakil?*" sneered Ali Baba. "The *wakils* are all scoundrels. May Allah grind their bones! No honest man can have the advantage of such people."

Grim looked the loads over, but there was nothing that any one could teach that gang about desert work. The goatskin water-bags were newly patched and moist; the gear was all in good shape, none new, but all well-tested; and there was food

*Tomorrow, if God is willing.

enough in double sacks for twenty men for a month. Mujrim, Ali Baba's giant oldest son, picked up the loads and turned them over for Grim to examine, with about as much apparent effort as if he were tossing pillows.

Presently Grim laughed again, and looked at the line of fifteen other sons and grandsons, all squatting in the shadow of the wall watching us.

Which is the chief Lothario?" he asked; only he used a much more expressive word than that, because the East is frank where the West deals in innuendo, and *vice versa*.

"They are all grown men," said Ali Baba.

"There's a woman named Ayisha—a Badawi (Bedouin)—who has lately come from El-Maan with a caravan of wheat merchants."

"How did you know that, Jimgrim?"

"I'm told she has been buying things in the *suk** that no Badawi could have use for, and has sent to Jerusalem for goods that could not be obtained here. I want to speak with her. Has any of your—" he smiled at the line of placidly contented sons again—"fathers of immorality made her acquaintance by some chance?"

Every one of the sixteen sons instantly assumed an expression of far-away meditation. Ali Baba looked shocked.

"I see!" said Grim. "Um-m-m! Well—none of my business. But one of you go fetch her to the Governorate. You may tell her she's not in trouble, but an officer wants first-hand information about El-Maan."

"Shall my sons be seen dragging a woman through the streets?" asked Ali Baba.

"Let's hope not. But I don't care to send the police. I don't want to put her to indignity, you understand. Suppose you arrange it for me, eh?"

"Listen, Jimgrim; that woman is a strange one! Men have spoken evil of her, but none can prove it. I have heard it said she has a devil. 'Trust in God but tie your camel,' says the Book.† The wisest among wise men would be he who let that woman alone!"

"I suppose I'll have to get Captain de Crespigny to arrange it for me."

"*Tfu!* ‡ There is no need for a man like you to appeal to the Governor. *Taib.* It shall be done. Have no doubt of it."

"All right. Send her up to the Governorate—and no delays, mind! We start tonight at sundown."

On our way back we met Narayan Singh returning from the *suk* with parcels under his arm. That in itself was a sure sign of the lapse of contact with law and order; in Jerusalem he would have had an Arab carry them, because dignity is part of a Sikh's uniform. You realized without a word said that the uniform would be discarded presently.

He looked me up and down as the quartermaster eyes a new recruit, and nodded in that exasperating way that makes you feel as if you had been ticketed and numbered. If Grim had not told me that the Sikh had been first to suggest taking me to Petra I would have insulted him painstakingly there and then; but you learn a certain amount of self-restraint, I suppose, before such a man as Narayan Singh ever approves of you for any purpose.

He undid the parcels on the dining-room table in the Governorate, and the next half-hour was spent in rigging me up as an ascetic-looking Indian Moslem, with the aid of a white turban wound over a cone-shaped cap, great horn-rimmed spectacles, and the comfortable, baggy garments that the unmodernized *hakim* wears over narrow cotton pantaloons.

Over it all they put a loose, brown Bedouin cloak of camel-hair such as any man expecting to travel across deserts might invest in, whatever his nationality; it was hotter than Tophet, but, as the Arabs say, what keeps the heat in will also keep it out. It gives you a feeling of carrying your home around with you on your back, the way a snail totes his shell, and there are worse sensations.

"Now consider yourself a while in the mirror, *sahib*," said Narayan Singh. "When a man knows how he looks he begins to act accordingly."

Have you ever stopped to think how true that is? There was a full-length mirror up-stairs in de Crespigny's bedroom, left behind by a German missionary's wife when the Turks and their friends stampeded, and Narayan Singh watched while I posed in front of it. Before many minutes, without any deliberately conscious effort on my part, gesture and attitude were molding

*Bazaar.

†The Moslems attribute all their favorite proverbs to the Koran, whether they are in the book or, as in this case, not.

‡An exclamation of contempt.

themselves to fit the costume, in somewhat the same way, I suppose, that a farm-hand from Montenegro shapes himself into a new American store suit.

"But it is necessary to remember!" warned Narayan Singh. "We should have done this sooner. There should be a photograph to carry with you, because a man forgets his own appearance where there are no mirrors, and none others resembling himself. Henceforward, *sahib*, sleeping or waking, be a *hakim!* There is a chest of medicines down-stairs."

By the time I got down Grim had already changed into Bedouin dress—stepped simply out of one world into another. All he does is to stain his eyebrows dark, put on the clothes, and cease to resemble anything on earth except a desert-born Arab. I don't know how long he was learning to make the transformation, but no man could learn the trick in twenty years unless he loved the desert and the sinewy men who live in it.

He looked me over again narrowly, and then decided I must return up-stairs and shave my head.

"The only chance you've got of not being pulled apart between four camels or pushed over a precipice is to look like darwaish. Have Narayan Singh stain the back of your neck with henna—not too much of it—just a little—you're from Lahore, you know—a university product."

By the time I had carried out that order I could not even recognize myself without the turban on.

"No matter how many mistakes now, *sahib!*" grinned the Sikh. "None but a crazy Moslem would travel in this sun with his head shaved. Better put a cloth inside the cap, thus, for greater safety."

The only other thing Grim did to me was to throw away my tooth-brush.

"They're suspicious in these parts," he said. "They'd figure that was hog-bristles. You'll have to make shift with a chewed stick, and pick your teeth between times with a dagger the way the rest of us do. Hello! Here she comes. You do the honors, 'Crep; we're in the game from now on."

De Crespigny went to the door and Grim and I squatted cross-legged in the window-seat. I tried to feel like a middle-aged native of the East under the rule of that twenty-six-year-old governor, but it couldn't be done. I don't know yet what the sensations are of, say, a bachelor of arts of Lahore university who has to take orders from a British subaltern. I expect you have to leave off pretending and really be an Indian to find that out; otherwise your liking for the fellow himself offsets reason. No white man could have helped liking young de Crespigny.

HE CAME in after a minute perfectly self-possessed, leading a young woman who took your breath away. I had heard all the usual stories about the desert women being hags, but every one of them was pure fiction to me from that minute. If all the rest were really what men said of them, this one was sufficiently amazing to redeem the lot. De Crespigny addressed her as princess, and she may have really ranked as one for all I know.

She sat on a chair, rather awkwardly as if not used to it, and we stared at her like a row of owls, she studying us in return, quite unabashed. The Badawi don't wear veils, and are not in the least ashamed to air their curiosity. She stared uncommonly hard at Grim.

Of middle height, supple and slender with the grace of all outdoors, smiling with a dignity that did not challenge and yet seemed to arm her against impertinence, not very dark, except for her long eyelashes—I have seen Italians and Greeks much darker—she somewhat resembled the American Indian, only that her face was more mobile.

Part of her beauty was sheer art, contrived by the cunning arrangement of the shawl on her head, and kohl on her eyelashes. That young woman knew every trick of deportment down to the outward thrust of a shapely bare foot in an upturned Turkish slipper. Her clothing was linen, not black cotton that Bedouin women usually wear, and much of it was marvelously hand-embroidered; but all the jewelry she wore was a necklace made of gold coins. It gave a finishing touch of opulence that is the crown of finished art.

But it was her eyes that took your breath away, and she was perfectly aware of it; she used them as the desert does all its weapons, frankly and without reluctance, sparing no consideration for the weak—rather looking for weakness to take advantage of it. They were wise—dark, deadly wise—alight with youth, and yet amazingly acquainted with all evil that is older

than the world. She was obviously not in the least afraid of us.

"You are from El-Maan?" asked de Crespigny, and she nodded.

"Did you come all this way alone?"

"No woman travels the desert alone."

"Tell me how you got here."

"You know how I got here. I came with a caravan that carried wheat—the wife of the sheikh of the caravan consenting."

She spoke the clean, concrete Arabic of the desert, that has a distinct word for everything, and for every phase of everything—another speech altogether from the jargon of the towns.

"Are they friends of yours?"

"Who travels with enemies?"

"Did you know them, I mean, before you came with them?"

"No."

"Then you are not from El-Maan?"

"Who said I was?"

"I thought you did."

"Nay, the words were yours, *khawaja!*"*

"Please tell me where you come from."

"From beyond El-Maan."

She made a gesture with one hand and her shoulder that suggested illimitable distances.

"From which place beyond El-Maan?"

She laughed, and you felt she did it not in self-defense but out of sheer amusement.

"Ask the jackal where his hole is! My people live in tents."

"Well, princess, tell me at any rate what you are doing here in El-Kalil."†

"Ask El-Kalil. The whole *suk* talks of me. I have made purchases."

"That's what I'm getting at. You've made some unusual purchases, and you've sent to Jerusalem for things that people don't use as a rule in tents out in the desert—silk stockings, for instance, and a phonograph with special records, and soft pillows, and writing-paper, and odds and ends like that. Do you use those things?"

"Why not?"

"Do you use books in French and English?"

She hesitated. It was the first time she had not seemed perfectly at ease.

"Can you even read Arabic?"

She did not answer.

"Then the books, at any rate, are meant for some one else? Tell me who that some one is."

"Allah!" she exploded. "May I not buy what I will, if I pay for it?"

But that was a false move. You can't upset the young British officer by storming at him. De Crespigny smiled, and came back at her with his next question suddenly.

"Are those things not for the wife of Ali Higg, and are you not from Petra?"

"If you know so surely whence I come, why do you ask me?"

"Are you a slave?"

"Allah!"

"How many wives has Ali Higg?"

"How should I know?"

"Because I think you are one of his wives. Is that not so?"

"I am Ayisha. I claim your honor's protection."

That was no false move. It was so nearly a checkmate that de Crespigny went to the sideboard for the silver box of cigarets, to offer her one and gain time for thought.

Ever since the days of Ruth, and no doubt long before that, it has been the first law of the desert that man or woman claiming protection can no longer be treated as an enemy. It is possibly the earliest form of free-masonry, and it survives.

Arab history is full of instances of a warrior laying down his life for an enemy who has claimed protection from him. And young de Crespigny was ruler of the most unruly city in the Near East because he understood better than most men how to respect Arab prejudices. Ayisha accepted a cigaret, fitted it into a long amber tube, and watched him.

"Very well," he said at last. "If I protect you, you must answer questions. Are you Ali Higg's wife?"

"Have I your honor's promise of protection?"

"Yes. Are you Ali Higg's wife?"

"I am his second wife."

"Thought so! And you've been sent to make purchases for number one?"

She nodded.

"How do you propose to convey all these things back to Petra?"

"Surely that is not difficult now that I am promised your honor's protection!"

"My district extends half-way to Beersheba, and to the eastward as far as the shore of the Dead Sea—no farther," said de Crespigny.

*Lit., gentleman-sir.
†Hebron.

"I can wait. I must wait for the purchases from Jerusalem. Sooner or later there will be a caravan across the desert to El-Maan. I have two servants here to make inquiries for me."

"Yes, and two more who went to Jerusalem. Four men. Tell me this, Princess Ayisha: How came Ali Higg to trust you, alone with four men, on such a long and difficult journey?"

"Is he not my lord?"

"But the men?"

"Is he not also their lord? And he holds their wives and sons in trust at Petra!"

"You'll admit it's unusual?"

"Do you find it strange that a woman should be faithful to her lord?"

"But to Ali Higg? He has a name—a reputation! How many wives has he?"

"The Koran permits but four. The others are not wives."

"And you're going back?"

"*Inshallah.*"*

It was obvious that no alternative would have the least appeal for her.

"Well, your movements have all been known to me. Your men have been watched. The word from Jerusalem is that the two you sent there have made their purchases. I heard over the telephone that they are on their way here. A suggestion has been made to me that you five might be held here as hostages to bring Ali Higg to terms."

She laughed.

"He would raid, and make prisoners, ten for one. If an exchange were not made promptly, his prisoners would be put to torture, and——"

De Crespigny saw fit to bring the conversation back to its other foot, as it were. Not the whole British army was in position just then to impose its will on Ali Higg, so certainly de Crespigny was not; and if you are any kind of real diplomatist with a career in front of you, you don't talk fight unless you mean it.

"But of course, as you've claimed my protection I couldn't dream of that," he assured her. "Now, is there anything else you want after those men get here from Jerusalem?"

"Nothing else."

"They'll be here in an hour or so. Would you be ready to leave at once for Petra?"

"As soon as I can join a caravan."

"Today? This evening, for instance?"

"Allah provide it!"

"That's settled, then."

He turned toward Grim.

"This is Sheikh Hajji,* Jimgrim bin Yazid of El-Abdeh, who has twice made the pilgrimage to Mecca. He is my honored friend. He starts tonight with a caravan toward Petra. You may travel with him and be in safe hands all the way."

She eyed Grim curiously, startled, it seemed to me. Then her expression changed slowly to excitement, followed by a look of baffling wisdom, as much as to say she knew something and would not tell. I don't think it was his name that startled her; that sounded Arabic enough.

"What business has he at Petra?" she asked.

De Crespigny let Grim answer that conundrum.

"*Ya sit Ayisha,*"† said Grim, "I carry a letter to Sheikh Ali Higg from some one in Arabia. I will deliver you along with the letter. You may have a place in my caravan—provided you have camels, provisions and a litter," he added; for the surest way to increase her already alert suspicion would have been to offer to provide everything.

"Let me see the letter!"

Grim produced one instantly—an envelope with a big red seal on it. It was marked across the top in large letters "On His Majesty's Service," but addressed in Arabic to somebody, and as she could not read she was satisfied.

"Ali Higg will hold you answerable for my safety if he has to destroy armies to reach you!" she said simply.

"*Ya sit Ayisha,*" Grim answered solemnly, "may Allah turn my face cold if Sheikh Ali Higg shall have fault to find with me in this matter!"

"How many is your caravan?" she asked.

"Twenty armed men."

She nodded.

"I will pay for my place in the caravan, according to the custom—the half now and the other half on arrival."

Without gesture, without moving a muscle of his face, Grim turned down that proposal desert-fashion, which is to say emphatically, with a reservation.

"*Ya sit Ayisha,* may Allah do so to me,

*If God is willing.

*One who has made the pilgrimage to Mecca.
†O lady Ayisha.

and more, if I will accept a price for this. Between Ali Higg and me let this thing be."

"*Taib*," she answered. "My men shall look for camels. I will go with you tonight."

She went away then, leaving a smile behind her that would have coaxed the Sphinx, and rode down-street toward the ancient city on a big gray donkey guarded by two Bedouins armed with swords and spears.

"Did I do all right?" asked de Crespigny.

"Fine!" Grim answered. "You'll be ruling England one of these days, 'Crep. Good job I had that letter to show her, though wasn't it?"

## CHAPTER III

*"Ali Higg's brains live in a black tent!"*

I HATE to have to admit that there was any virtue in Suliman, or anything other than vice in his new chum Abdullah. The two little devils stole my cigarets, and deviled me unmercifully about my disguise, making improper jokes, at which Ali Baba and his sons laughed uproariously, and which they recalled at intervals for days afterwards.

But almost immediately after the "lady Ayisha" had left the Governorate I was forced to admit that the brats were useful. In their own way they served Grim as a pair of hounds work for a man out hunting rabbits, for they could penetrate places and be welcome where a grown man would be killed—at the very *least*—for intruding or attempting to intrude. Harems, for instance. And they could be naive and wheedling toward a woman when they chose.

They came in with their tongues hanging out like a pair of pups, and sticky with the awful stuff men sell for candy in the El-Kalil bazaars. Evidently some woman had been pumping them for information, and Grim made them stand in front of him on the carpet.

"Well?"

They both spoke at once. Now and then one paused for breath and then the other, but on the whole it was a neck-and-neck race to tell the tale first.

"There was a woman in the *suk* who had heard of Jimgrim but never saw him, and she bought us sweets and took us to her house, and she asked us questions about Jimgrim, and we told lies, and she asked us what we were doing in El-Kalil and we said nothing, and she said *wallah!* That was very little, and then she asked us all over again about Jimgrim. (*Gasp.*)

"So we said Jimgrim has already gone back to Jerusalem, and she did not believe, but we swore by the beard of the Prophet, so she said what were we going to do now, and we said we would go to the Governorate and beg for bread. (*Gasp.*)

"So she said what next, and we said there is a great sheikh here from Arabia, who makes a journey to Petra, and *inshallah* he will take us with him, and she said why did we want to go to Petra, and we said because our mothers were carried off by the Turks and sold to the Arabs and *inshallah* we should find them near Petra. (*Gasp.*)"

"So far, good!" said Grim. "That's what she got out of you. Now what did you get out of her?"

"She said *wallah!* There is Ali Higg at Petra and he grinds the face of the poor and is a great chief and will make us prisoners and sell us for slaves or have us turned into eunuchs, and we said (*gasp*) that we are *msakin** and not afraid of Ali Higg and he may as well have us as anybody, and if it is written that we shall be eunuchs then it is written and who shall change it? (*Gasp.*)

"And she said what made us think the great sheikh will take us to Petra, and we said because he had promised but he may be a big liar and we don't know yet."

"What kind of woman is she?" Grim asked.

"A big fat woman with a belly like two water-bags one on top of the other, thus!"

"What is her name?"

"She is the wife of Ismail ben Rafiki the wool-dealer."

"Uh-huh. Yes. Go on."

"So she said we should come back here and find out if the sheikh will really take us and say to the sheikh (*gasp*) there is a lady in the city who can be of service to him in a certain matter and he should come back with us and we should lead him to the house and she will give us money and the sheikh will understand."

"Good!" pronounced Grim. "Not half bad. Just for that I'll go with you."

He winked at de Crespigny, nodded to me, pulled on a black-and-white striped Bedouin cloak, and went off with them at once. Whereat Narayan Singh came in,

*Poverty-stricken.

looking like another person altogether, although if anything bigger than before. He had got out of uniform and was dressed in a medley of Indian and Arab costume that made him look like one of those slaves in the Arabian Nights who cut off the heads of women. All he needed was a big curved simitar to fill the bill.

"Henceforth I am the *hakim's* servant," he said, showing his teeth in an enormous grin. "Only," he added, "since it will be I who instruct the *hakim*, in secret the *sahib* must listen to me."

He got out the medicine-chest, and being a Sikh with all of a soldier's opinion of civilians, proposed to teach me what the labels on the little bottles stood for. Even he laughed after a minute or two, when he had got himself thoroughly sewed up and called each bottle by its wrong name.

"Ah! What does it matter!" he exclaimed at last. "Sore eyes—broken leg—boils—knife-wound—let it be all one. Give episin salts—always episin. Then, if we are long in one place, so that a sick man comes a second time, swearing grievously because of episin, give croton. That person will not come again, but the fame of the *hakim* will spread far and wide."

"You'd much better teach me how a *hakim* sits a camel," I suggested.

"All ways, *sahib*, for the *hakim* is not seldom a *bunnia* whose parents bought him education. Softer than wax is the rump of a *bunnia* and one who reads books. He sits this way until the boils break out, and then that way until the skin chafes. Then presently he lies across the saddle on his belly and either prays or curses, according as his spirit is pious or otherwise. But the camel continues to proceed, since that is its nature."

"Well, go on instruct the *hakim* then. The *sahib* listens."

"It is well to remember there will be with us, besides those seventeen thieves of this place, who know who we truly are, four sons of the desert and a woman. Now the woman, being woman, and they are all alike, will take note of the *hakim* and pretend to little sicknesses for the sake of making talk. Whereas the men, being as it were the guardians of the woman, will be seized with pride and jealousy. So that what with the woman's curiosity and the men's watchfulness, there will be great need for discretion."

"How would you define discretion?"

"In the case of the woman, insolence. In the case of the men, a good humor—with perhaps some such physic for quarrelsomeness as croton oil administered in their food on suitable occasion. Whenever they get suspicious, *sahib*, drench their food!

"When the woman makes great eyes and shams complaints, tell her what their cursed Prophet said of women. Never mind whether he said it or not, *sahib*, for she will not know the truth of it, never having read the book. Only speak evil of all women, and so we shall come to Ali Higg's nest in good repute."

"All right. I'll try not to flirt with the lady. What next?"

"The *sahib* will be accused of being a Persian, and will be insulted accordingly, for none loves a Persian in this land, Islam having two chief sects, of which the Persians chose to adopt the Shia faith, which is not in favor with the Sunni, who are most numerous and most fanatic. The less the Sunni knows of his religion the more he despises a Shia; and when these people despise they steal, strike, abuse and act otherwise unseemly."

"But I'm not supposed to be a Persian, am I?"

"No, for you could never act a Persian's part. But they will accuse you of being a Persian because you are an Indian, as I have heard a man called a dago because he was born somewhere south of a certain line. When it has been established that you are no Persian, but an Indian, it must be remembered that there are only two kinds of Indians whom they do not despise, and they are Sikhs and Pathans—Sikhs, because a Sikh can smite three Arabs with one hand, and the Pathan for much the same reason.

"But I must not go as a Sikh because of the religious difficulty; neither may you be a Pathan, because you in no way resemble one, nor do you speak the Pushtu tongue. But I will be a Pathan, because I can speak that language; therefore they will respect me as a man prone to fight readily and well. And knowing that no Pathan would demean himself by being servant to a man of no account, they will more readily respect you. Although you are neither Sikh nor yet Pathan but are supposed to be a Punjabi Mussulman. Therefore, *sahib*, you must take a middle course between peace and pugnacity, pretending on the one hand

to restrain my quarrelsomeness, yet on the other depending for safety on my readiness to take offense—as a man who is accustomed to a servant of mettle."

The rest of his lecture was about niceties of behavior, religious observances, and so on. It was a mystery how that man had never been promoted. He seemed to have eyes for everything and a memory for everything that he had ever observed. The Sikh despises the religion of Islam quite as fervently as the follower of the Prophet scorns Sikhism; yet he seemed familiar with every detail of Moslem custom, and knew to what extent geography affected it. The point he seemed to understand best was how to turn the flank of ignorant fanaticism.

"Whenever you make a mistake, *sahib*, remember this: You are Darwaish, which is a man who is privileged, having set behind him all unimportant matters. So, when you are accused of not observing this or that, or of acting with impropriety, confound the Bedouin always by sneering at their ignorance, saying that where you come from men know what is proper. And Jimgrim, having truly made the pilgrimage to Mecca, will confound them likewise, having knowledge, whereas most of these rascals only know by hearsay."

I SUPPOSE he lectured me for two hours, until Grim came in looking pleased with himself, followed by the two infants looking much more pleased. You can't mistake the adventurous air of an eight-year-old with money hidden on his person, whatever his nationality may be. De Crespigny followed them in to learn the news.

"Know anything about old Rafiki, the wool-merchant?" Grim asked.

"Steady-going old party," said de Crespigny. "Says his prayers, cheats his customers, keeps the curfew law, and runs a three-wife establishment, I believe, in three parts of town, all according to the Book. Why, have you run foul of him?"

"He has offered me ten thousand piasters to poison Ali Higg!"

"Show me the money!" laughed de Crespigny.

"He was hardly as previous as that. His head wife bribed these kids to bring me to the house, and the old boy met me in the wool-store. Said he'd been told I was going to Petra.

"First suggestion he made was that I should take my time on the road and waylay a caravan that's sure to follow. He'd no idea, of course, that the lady Ayisha is to travel with me. His little scheme is to provide her with camels and men on his own account—mean camels and his own men, who would run away at the first sign of trouble.

"He assumes that I'm a gay Lochinvar who'd like nothing better than to carry off the lady. He wants her carried off and ravished as a spite for Ali Higg.

"Well, I didn't exactly fall for that; said I couldn't very well approach Ali Higg afterward, and he admitted that relations in that case might be kind o' strained. So he proposed next that I should meet up with Ali Higg and poison him. He offered to supply the poison—stuff that he said would make him die slowly in agony."

"What's his quarrel with Ali Higg?"

"Seems the old boy had a daughter who was the apple of his eye—or so he said. She was on her way down to Egypt; and I suspect she did not travel by train because she's been bought by some beast of a pasha. They didn't want inquiries by passport people, or any interfering bunk like that.

"Anyhow Ali Higg is quite a ladies' man, and he happened to be crossing the map with part of his gang of thieves somewhere down Beersheba way. He agreed with the pasha on the point of taste and carried off the girl. So old wool-merchant Rafiki had to refund the purchase price—not that he admitted that to me, of course.

"I suspect that's where the rub comes. If he hadn't been selling the girl illegally, he'd surely have complained to you about the rape in the first instance. As it was, he couldn't think of anything except revenge.

"I asked him if he'd take the girl back, and he said no, what should he do with her? What he wants is money, or else the lingering death of Ali Higg; and seeing it's about as easy to get money out of that gentleman as cream cheese out of the moon, he's willing to part with a hundred pounds for either of two things—the rape of Ayisha or the death of Ali Higg. On those terms he vows he'd die contented."

"If he finds out that Ayisha goes with you tonight, he'll try to corrupt old Ali Baba or one of his sons," said de Crespigny.

"Yes, and he probably *will* find it out.

But corrupting Ali Baba would take time and a lot of money; and none of his sons dares do a thing without the old man's approval. I feel fairly sure of the gang. Point is, do you know of any other gang that the wool-merchant could hire right now to attack us somewhere on the road?"

"There's none in Hebron that would dare. Plenty outside in the villages."

"The lady Ayisha has probably told that she's going tonight," said Grim. "Old woolly-wits might not find it out until too late, but I suspect his wives get all the gossip that's going. Then he'll have to work fast, because we shall move fast. What villages does he trade with chiefly?"

"The Beni-Assan and the Beni-Khor."

"Small crowds, both of them. Counting her four fanatics we'll be four-and-twenty armed men, and tough in the bargain. Is there any outlying sheikh who owes old Rafiki money? Who are his wives, for instance?"

"Now you're on the track," said de Crespigny. "One of his wives—the third, I think—is the daughter of Abbas Mahommed of the Beni-Yussuf tribe. Abbas Mahommed is always in debt to him."

"Where's his place?"

"Down near the lower end of the Dead Sea. Right near where you'll want to pitch your first camp. Abbas Mahommed sells him camel-wool and hides, and goes in debt in advance regularly. This Spring for some reason he delivered very little, and is still heavily in debt to Rafiki."

"How many men has he?"

"Might turn out fifty strong."

"That's where we're due for our first trouble then," said Grim. "We'll have to put one over on him. I know one way of spoiling friend Rafiki's game; old woolly-wits'll fall sure. Suppose you go see him, 'Crep, or send for him, and ask him straight out to provide camels for the lady Ayisha. He'll send his own men along with them, of course, and give them private instructions. Let's see—four men and a woman plus provisions, and he'll probably send five men with them—twelve camels, eh? Who else can raise seven good camels in this place?"

"Easy. I know where to get 'em."

"Good. Hire them then. Tie them in two strings and send them out with two policemen to wait for us ten miles along the road. Be sure they start ahead of us. Soon as we overtake them I'll dismiss Rafiki's men who'll be nothing but his spies, swap the princess and her four men and their loads on to the fresh beasts, and leave the police to chase Rafiki's experts home again. Will you do that?"

It was getting well along toward sunset, and de Crespigny had to hurry; but one of the advantages of being short-handed as administrator of a district is that you have to keep in intimate personal touch with all essentials, and there was not much that young de Crespigny did not know about getting what he wanted done in quick time. Within half an hour seven pretty good camels were sauntering southward out of Hebron, with a couple of phlegmatic Arab policemen perched on the two leaders, and the noses of the others tied to the empty saddles of the beasts ahead. They were neither as big nor in as good condition as old Ali Baba's wonderful string, but very likely better than any that the wool-merchant would provide, and by that much less likely to reduce our speed after we should make the change.

"You see how easy it is," said Grim, "for a rascal like Ali Higg to upset a whole countryside. Here we are getting the crime of Palestine running in grooves, as it were, so's to regulate it first and then reduce it to reasonable proportions, and all that beast needs do is steal a woman and start civil war."

But I did not see that the wool-merchant's private plans for vengeance amounted to civil war, and said so.

"Hah! Wait and see!" said Grim. "Woolly-wits goes after vengeance. Somebody gets killed. That means a blood-feud. All the relatives of the slain man—whether it's Ali Higg or one of his retainers doesn't matter—take up arms; and all the relatives of woolly-wits do ditto. For each man killed in the war that follows the other side is out for the equivalent in life or goods. Village after village gets drawn in.

"Suppose that sheikh at the south end of the Dead Sea who's in debt to woolly-wits jumps at the chance to loot our caravan and bag the lady, we'll be lucky if one or two of our men don't get scuppered. That means a blood-feud between that village and all old Ali Baba's clan.

"But that isn't nearly all, nor nearly the worst of it. Ali Higg learns next that the Dead Sea outfit have tried to waylay

his wife; so he takes the war-path. And instead of that making a three-cornered fight of it, it might mean an offensive alliance between Ali Higg and Ali Baba's gang.

"Civil war would be a very mild name for that. There'd be brains brought to bear on it. The administration might have to spend twenty or thirty thousand pounds and jail a lot of estimable Arabs. The thing to do is to stop that kind of thing before it happens."

"By corralling Ali Higg, I suppose?" said I.

"Can't very well do that. He's a free man. Of course he's got no right to cross our border and steal women, but on the other hand he's made himself boss of a district that no other Government pretends to control.

"If we can catch him our side of the line, he's our meat; but that's reciprocal; if he can catch us on his side, there's no law to prevent his doing what he likes with us. We've got to use our heads with Master Ali Higg."

I think that was the first time it really dawned on me that this venture was going to be dangerous. Even so, the calmness with which Grim considered leaving law and all the means of its enforcement behind and crossing deserts with a gang of known thieves for accomplices, took most of the edge off it.

You simply couldn't feel scared when that fellow smiled and exposed the risks in detail, even with dark coming on and the sound of camels being made to kneel outside the window. For Ali Baba had become convinced at last that Grim really intended to start that night, and, making a virtue of necessity, was better than punctual. The camels were groaning and swearing as they always do at the prospect of a night's work.

"As I see it, any tribe out there has as much right to elect Ali Higg leader as you and I have to elect a President," said Grim. "I don't suppose they did elect him, but they'll claim they did. The point is, he's got himself elected somehow. We've no veto. I don't hold with murder; it sets a bad example and turns loose a horde of individual trouble-makers who were under something like control before. It might be easy to have him murdered; you see how easy old woolly-wits thought it might be. Murder has always been the solution of politics in the old world right down to date; and look where they're at in consequence!"

"You must have some idea to go on," I suggested. "What's your plan?"

"They say I look a bit like Ali Higg."

"But what then? Haven't you a plan? Nothing you mean to try first?"

"Oh yes. *Chercher la femme.*"

"So there's a woman in it?"

"You bet! Ali Higg's no born statesman. His brains live in a black tent, and he keeps 'em encouraged with French and English books bought in Jerusalem—silk stockings—gramophones—all kinds of things."

"What is she? A Turk? I've heard some of them are educated nowadays."

"No. And she never was a Turk. She was born in Bulgaria of Greco-Russo-Bulgar parents, educated at Roberts College and Columbia University, New York, married to a drummer in the shredded-codfish business, divorced—on what grounds I don't know—divorced him, though, I believe—came out here as war-worker—teacher in refugee camps in Egypt—made the acquaintance of Ali Higg when he was prisoner of war down there—he was fighting for the Turks at one time—and helped him to escape.

"I've never set eyes on her, but they say she's a rare good-looker and has more brains in her little finger than most men keep under their hats. I'm told she has designs on the throne of Mesopotamia."

"Mespot? I thought the League of Nations was going to let the Arabs choose their own king?"

"Sure. And as soon as she sees that Ali Higg's pretensions don't amount to a row of shucks I wouldn't give ten piasters for that gentleman's lease of life! Borgia had nothing on her, they tell me."

"So we're out to play chess with a white woman. Why didn't you tell me this before?"

"What's your hurry?" asked Grim. "If you find out too much all at once you'll lose your bearings. I'll introduce you to the lady if we ever reach Petra right side up. Now let's eat, and get a move on. A full belly for a long march! Come."

## CHAPTER IV

*"Go and ask the kites then at Dat Ras!"*

SO FAR everything worked out strictly according to plan. We had hardly finished a hurried meal when the lady Ayisha and her men arrived on mean baggage camels provided by old Rafiki; and

they were not in the least pleased with their mounts, for a baggage camel is as different from a beast trained to carry a rider as an up-to-date limousine is from a Chinese one-wheel barrow. Perched on top of the lady Ayisha's beast was a thing they call a *shibriyah*—a sort of tent with a top like an umbrella, resting on the loads slung to the camel's flanks. From inside that she was busy abusing everybody.

There was only one good camel with her outfit—a small, blooded-looking Bishareen, a shade or two lighter in color than the rest, ridden by a wiry, mean rascal with a very black face. He seemed anxious not to assert himself, for he kept his mount well away in the shadows, and moved off when any one approached him.

It was growing pitch-dark. Grim counted noses and gave the order to be off. Two or three men mounted, and that brought all the kneeling camels to their feet. One of Ali Baba's sons caught the beast assigned to me, brought him round to the gate, and began *nakhing* him to make him kneel again. But I know one or two things about Arabs and their ways of assessing humanity. Knowledge is for use.

"Do you mistake me for a cripple?" I asked, and instead of continuing to *nakh* in the camel language he pulled the beast's head down.

The trick is simple enough. You put your foot on the hollow of the camel's neck and swing into the saddle as he raises his head again. Men used to the desert despise you if you have to make your mount kneel in order to get on his back, pretty much as horsemen of other lands despise the tenderfoot who can't rope and saddle his own pony. There's no excuse for that, of course; it stands to reason that lots of first-class men can't mount a camel standing, never having done it; but according to desert lore, whoever has to make his camel kneel is a person of no account.

So I started off with at least one minus mark not notched against me. There was also an enormous feeling of relief, because I heard those two brats blubbering at being left behind.

And oh, what a start that was before the moonrise, with the great soft-footed beasts like shadows stringing one behind another into line through the streets of a city as old as Abraham! Utter silence, except for three camel-bells with different notes. Instant, utter severance from all the new world, with its wheels that get you nowhere and conventions that have no meaning except organized whimsy.

Peace under the stars, wholly aloof and apart from the problem that had sent us forth. And the feel under you of league-welcoming resilience, whatever the camels might say by way of objection. And they said a very great deal gutturally, as camels always do, yielding their prodigious power to our use with an incomprehensible mixture of grouchiness and inability to do less than their best.

Grim rode in advance. His was the first camel-bell that jangled with a mellow note somewhere in the darkness around the turn of a narrow street, or in a tunnel, where house joined house overhead. The lady Ayisha's was the second bell, three beasts ahead of me; she being the guest of honor as it were, or rather the prize passenger, it was important to know her whereabouts at any given moment. And last of all came old Ali Baba with the third bell announcing that all were present and correct. He and his men sat their camels with a stately pride more than half due to the rifles and bandoliers that had been served out.

That black-faced fellow on the little Bishareen did not trouble himself about position in the line as long as we wound through the city streets. He was next in front of me, and I saw him exchange signals with a fat man in a house door, who may have been Rafiki the wool-merchant. Narayan Singh was next behind me, and I looked back to make sure that he had seen the signal too.

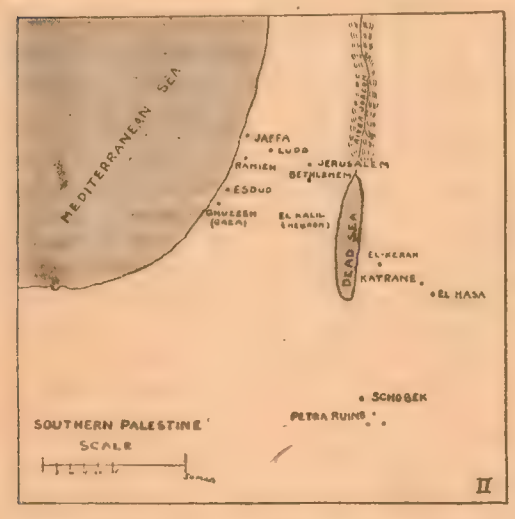
But when we passed out of the city at the south end and began to swing along a white road at a clip that was plenty fast enough for the baggage beasts, the man in front of me urged his beast forward, thrusting others out of the way and getting thoroughly well cursed for it, until he rode next behind Grim.

Seeing that, Narayan Singh rode after him, flogging furiously, and got well cursed too. But nothing else in particular happened for several miles until we began to descend between huge hills of limestone and, just as the moon rose, came on the reserve camels waiting for us in the charge of two policemen in a hollow.

Then there began to be happenings. First there was shrill delight from Ayisha and

a chorus of approval from her four men at the prospect of changing to reasonably decent mounts. Then a tumult of indignation from the wool-merchant's crowd—blunt refusal by them to consent to any change at all—threats—abuse—arguments—the roaring of camels, who object on principle to everything, whatever it is, even to a chance to rest because it hurts their backs to stand still loaded—and over it all presently Grim's voice issuing orders in a tone you did not hear from him except when things go wrong.

Strange that they don't choose leaders more often for their voices! It's the most obvious thing in the world that a man with




a silver tongue, as they call it, can swing and sway any crowd. If that man knows his own mind and has a plan worth spending effort on, he can trumpet cohesion out of tumult and win against men with twenty times his brains. I don't doubt Peter the Hermit had a voice like a bell-buoy in a tide-rip. Grim pitched his above the babel so that every word fell sharp, clear and manly. They began to obey him there and then.

But he could not attend to everything at once, and while he oversaw the changing of pack-saddles and gave orders to the policemen to ride back on the camels behind Rafiki's men and see them safely into the city, that black-faced fellow on the Bishareen edged away, and in a moment was off at full gallop headed southward. Narayan Singh was the first to see him go, but it was half a minute before he could get near Grim and call his attention to it.

Grim ordered three of Ali Baba's men in pursuit at once.

"Shall we shoot? Shall we slay?" asked one of them.

"No, no. He hasn't committed any crime yet. Catch him and bring him back."

"Crime? What is crime out here? We can kill him. But overtake him on that beast? *Wallah!*"

They wasted another minute arguing for leave to shoot, and by the time they were off the deserter had a long start; but they rode with a will when they did go.

If anything on earth looks more absurd than a ridden camel galloping away in the moonlight, with his neck stretched out in front of him and his four ungainly legs in the air all together, it is three more camels doing the same thing. They looked like a giant's washing blown off the line flapping before a high wind, and made hardly more noise. The whack-whack-whack of sticks on the beasts' rumps was as distinct as pistol-shots, but you hardly heard the galloping footfall.

Grim went on about his business, for changing loads in the dark is a job that needs attention, unless you choose to have a good beast lose heart before morning and lie down in the middle of the road. A camel in pain from a badly cinched girth will endure it without argument for just so long; after which he quits, and not all the whacking or persuading in the world will get him up again.

At the end of twenty minutes we were under way once more. Peace closed down on us, and we swayed along under the stars in majestic silence. There have been better nights since, I think; but until then that was the most glorious experience of a lifetime.

It is my peculiar delight to read and relive ancient history, and of all history books the Old Testament is vastly the most absorbing—far and away the most accurate. There is a school of fools who set themselves up to scoff at its facts, but every new discovery only confirms the old record; and here were we sauntering through the night on camels over hills where the fathers of history fought for the first beginnings of each man's right to do his own thinking in his own way.

AFTER a while Ali Baba gave his camel-bell to his oldest son Mujrim, and forced his beast up beside mine, seeming to think silence might ruin the nerves of such a raw hand as myself. Or perhaps it was pride of race and country that impelled him. Even the meanest Arab thrills with emotion when he contemplates his ancient heritage, just as he rages at the prospect of seeing the Jews return to it, and Ali Baba, though a prince of thieves, was surely not a man without a heart.

But the trouble with Arab as distinguished from Jewish history is that too little of it was written down, and too much of it invented to prove a theory—much like the stuff they put between the covers of school history-books—so Ali Baba's lecture, although gorgeous fiction in its way, hardly enriched knowledge. Not that he was free from the latter-day craving for accuracy whenever it might serve to bolster up the rest of the fabric.

"Yonder," he said, for instance, pointing toward the skyline with a dramatic sweep of his arm, "they say that Adam and Eve are buried. But they lie!"

And having denounced that lie, he expected me to believe everything else he told me.

According to him every rock we passed had its history of jinn and spirits as well as battles, and he knew where the tomb was of every national saint and hero, every one of whom had apparently died within a radius of twenty miles. Some of them had died in two or three different places as far as I could make out from his account of them.

And what Abraham had not done on those hillsides in the way of miracles and war would not be worth writing in a book; whatever can not be otherwise explained is set down to the Ancestor, the Arabs ranking Abraham next after Mohammed, because the patriarch built the Kaaba, or Mosque at Mecca, that Mohammed centuries later on adopted for his new religion.

But even Ali Baba grew tired of acting historian at last, and once more silence settled down, broken only by the bells and the camels' gurgling, until about midnight we overhauled the three men who had been sent in chase of the fellow on the Bishareen. They had lost him, and were angry; for what should a man do except be angry in such a circumstance, unless he is willing to accept blame?

"You should have let us shoot, Jimgrim! Once I got close enough to have cut his beast's legs with my sword! You think this is like the city, where a policeman holds up a hand and men halt? Hah! *Wallah!* It was he who drew sword, and behold my camel's nose where he slashed at it! One finger's breadth closer and I would have had a sick beast on my hands—but he proved a blundering pig with his weapon and only made that scratch after all.

"However, it is your fault, Jimgrim! You have made us to be laughed at by that father of dung-hills! His beast was the faster, and he got away, and vanished in the shadows."

So there we halted and held a conference, letting the camels kneel and rest for half an hour, while each man said his say in turn.

"That man is Rafiki's messenger," said Grim. "He is on his way to Abbas Mahommed, Sheikh of the Beni Yussuf, who owes Rafiki money. I think Rafiki is offering to forego the debt if Abbas Mahommed will lie in wait for us and carry off this woman."

He did not ask for suggestions. There was no need. Every one of those cloaked and muffled rascals had a notion of his own on the spur of the moment, and was eager to get it adopted.

"Allah!" said Ali Baba. "Let us fight, then, with Abbas Mahommed, and plunder his harem instead! It is simple. We come on his village before dawn when those sons of Egyptian mothers* are asleep. We set fire to the thatch, and thereafter act as seems fit, slaying some and letting others escape!"

"*Wallah!* Let us ride straight through the village, set a light to it, and run," suggested Mujrim. "There isn't a woman in that place I would burden a camel with."

"Nevertheless, we should take some women to keep as hostages against the time when a blood-feud begins."

"And surely we shall carry off some camels."

"Aye! They have a horse or two as well. Abbas Mahommed trades with El-Kerak, and only last month acquired a fine brown mare that caught my eye."

"What are fifty men! We can fight twice fifty of such spawn as the Beni Yussuf."

*To call any one an Egyptian is an Arab's notion of a perfect insult.

*"Wallah!* They ran when the police paid them a visit. Ran from the police!"

"Yes, and were afraid to kill the Jew who sued Abbas Mahommed in the court for arrears of interest. They are cowards, who dare not take their sheikh's part in a dispute."

"Better wait until dawn, and then ride by their village and defy them."

But the lady Ayisha had the most astonishing suggestion. She came out from under the curtains of the *shibriyah* and sat against her camel's rump to face the circle of armed men and instruct them.

*"Taib!"* she said scornfully. "Let this Abbas Mahommed come and take me. I have a knife for his belly in any event. You go on to Ali Higg and say his wife is in the hands of that scum. Ali Higg can cross the desert in three days, and by the evening of the fourth day there will be no village left, nor a man to call Abbas Mahommed by his name. If I haven't killed him already Abbas Mahommed will be carried off to Petra with the women, who shall watch what is done to him before they are apportioned with the other loot. That is simplest. Let Abbas Mahommed lift me if he dares!"

She was clearly a young woman not averse to experiences, as well as confident of her lord's good will. But Grim had the peace of the border in mind; and the gang were not at all disposed to stand by meekly while Abbas Mahommed paid a debt so easily to a mere wool-merchant.

"I am an old man," said Ali Baba, "and must die soon. May He Who never sleeps* slay me before I see my sons afraid to fight Abbas Mahommed and all his host!"

"Let's talk like wise men and not fools," proposed Grim at last, and since he had let them all have their say first they heard him in silence now. "The difficulty is that Abbas Mahommed's village lies at the corner of the Dead Sea. We must turn that corner. If we pass between him and the sea he has us between land and water. If we journey too far south to avoid him, we lose at least a day and tire our camels out. A forced march now would mean that we must feed the camels corn, and we have none too much of it with us; whereas tomorrow the grazing will be passable, and farther on, where the grazing is poor, we shall need the corn."

*"Wallah!* The man knows."

*"Inshalla,* let there be a fight then!"

"Wait!" counseled Ali Baba. "I know this Jimgrim. There will be a deception and a ruse, but no fight. Listen to him. Wait and see!"

"I think we will travel to the southward," said Grim, "and halt at dawn out of sight of Abbas Mahommed's village. There let the camels graze. But I, and a few of us, will take the lady Ayisha's camel with the *shibriyah,* and draw near to the village. That black-faced rogue of Rafiki's will point us out to them, for he will recognize the *shibriyah.*

"Then when they come to seize the lady Ayisha they will find no woman in the litter. So they will believe that Rafiki's messenger has told lies that are blacker than his face, and will beat him and let us go."

"But if they do not let you go? They are ruffians, you know, Jimgrim."

"Then I shall find another way."

"And how will you account for being so few men, when Rafiki's messenger will have said we are at least a score?"

"Will that not be further proof that the man is a liar?"

"If I did not know you of old I would say that is a fool's plan," remarked Ali Baba, and his sons grunted agreement. "But you have a devil of resourcefulness. *Taib!* Let us try this plan and see what comes of it."

SO WE started off again to a running comment of contemptuous disapproval from the lady Ayisha, who seemed to think that no plan could be a good one unless it entailed murder. The farther we headed eastward, the nearer we came to the pale beyond which her lord and master's word was summary law, the more openly she advocated drastic remedies for everything, and the less she was inclined to take no for an answer.

However, her monolog was wasted on the moon, for no one argued with her. Grim led the way—off the highroad now, and down dark defiles that set the camels moaning, while their riders yelled alternately to Allah and apostrophized their beasts in the monosyllabic camel-language. Camels hate down-hill work, especially when loaded, and fall unless told not to in a speech they understand, in that respect strangely like some children.

You had to look out in the dark, too, for the teeth of the camel behind, because they

*A synonym for Allah.

don't love the folk who drive them headlong into gorges full of ghosts, and one man's thigh or elbow makes as easy biting as the next.

Camels are no man's pets, and there is no explaining them. The fools will graze contentedly with shrapnel and high explosives bursting all about them, but go into a panic at the sight of a piece of paper in broad daylight. And when they think they see ghosts in the dark they act like the Gadarene swine, only making more noise about it.

I wouldn't have been the lady Ayisha going down some of those dark places for all the wealth of ancient Bagdad. Her *shibriyah* pitched and rolled like a small boat in a big sea, and whenever a rock leaned out over the narrow trail, or a scraggy old thorn-branch swung, it was by a combination of luck and good carpentry that she was saved from being pitched down under the following camel's feet. Whoever made that *shibriyah* could have built the ark.

But we came down through one last terrific gorge on to a level plain, where the camel-thorn grew in clumps and the heat radiating from the hills was like the breath from an oven door behind us. There the animals went best foot forward, as if they smelled the dawn and hoped to meet it sooner by hurrying. We had quite a job to keep back for the loaded beasts, and three or four men, instead of one, brought up the rear to prevent straggling.

Then, about an hour before dawn, in a hollow between sparsely vegetated sand-dunes, Grim ordered camp pitched, and in very few minutes there was a row of little cotton tents erected, with a small fire in front of each.

Most of the camels were turned out at once to graze off the unappetizing-looking thorns, sparse and dusty, that peppered the field of view like scabs on a yellow skin. There was no fear of their wandering too far, for if the camel ever was wild, as many maintain that he never was, that was so long ago that the whole species has forgotten it, and he wouldn't know what to do without his owner somewhere near.

He has to be used at night, because he will not eat at night; on the other hand, he refuses to sleep in the day-time; so there is a limit to what you can do with a camel, in spite of his endurance, and once in so many days he has to be given a twenty-four-hour rest so that he may catch up on both food and sleep.

But on the dry plains such as where we were then they give less trouble than anywhere. For though they soon go sick on good corn, which a horse must have, they thrive and grow fat on desert gleanings; and whereas sweet water will make their bellies ache oftener than not, the brackish, dirty stuff from wells by the Dead Sea shore is nectar to them.

Have you ever seen twenty camels rolling all at once with their legs in the air, preparatory to making breakfast off dry thorns that you wouldn't dare handle with gloves on? If so, you'll understand that they're the perfect opposite of every other useful beast that lives.

But not all the camels were turned out. Grim chose Mujrim—Ali Baba's eldest son—a black-bearded, forty-year-old giant—two of the younger men, Narayan Singh and me; and with the lady Ayisha's beast in tow with the empty *shibriyah* set off directly the sun was a span high over the nearest dune.

WE RODE almost straight toward the sun, and in five minutes it appeared how close we were to the village whence danger might be expected. It was a straggling, thatched, squalid-looking cluster of huts, surrounded by a mud wall with high, arched gates. Only one minaret like a candle topped with an extinguisher pretended to anything like architecture, and even from where we were you could see the rubbish-heaps piled outside the wall to reek and fester. There was a vulture on top of the minaret, and kites and crows—those inevitable harbingers of man—were already busy with the day's work.

The village Arabs are perfunctory about prayer, unless unctuous strangers are in sight, who might criticize. So, although we approached at prayer-time, it was hardly a minute after we rose in view over a low dune before a good number of men was on the wall gazing in our direction. And before we had come within a mile of the place the west gate opened and a string of camel-men rode out.

The man at their head was the sheikh by the look of him, for we could see his striped silk head-dress even at that distance, and he seemed to have a modern rifle as against the spears and long-barreled muskets of the others. There were about two-score of

them, and they rode like the wind in a half-circle with the obvious intention of surrounding us. Grim led straight on.

They rode around and around us once or twice before the man in the striped headgear called a halt. He seemed disturbed by Grim's nonchalance, and asked our business with not more than half a challenge in his voice.

"Water," Grim answered. "Did Allah make no wells in these parts?"

It doesn't pay to do as much as even to suggest your real reason for visiting an Arab village, for they won't believe you in any case.

"What have you in the *shibriyah?*"

"Come and see."

The Sheikh Mahommed Abbas drew near alone, suspiciously, with his cocked rifle laid across his lap. His men began moving again, circling around us slowly—I suppose with the idea of annoying us; for that is an old trick, to irritate your intended victim until some ill-considered word or gesture gives excuse for an attack. But we all sat our camels stock-still, and, following Grim's example, kept our rifles slung behind us.

The sheikh was a rather fine-looking fellow, except for smallpox marks. He had a hard eye, and a nose like an eagle's beak; and that sort of face is always wonderfully offset by a pointed black beard such as he wore. But there was something about the way he sat his camel that suggested laziness, and his lips were not thin and resolute enough, to my mind, to match that beard and nose. I would have bet on three of a kind against him sky-high, even if he had passed the draw.

He drew aside the curtain of the *shibriyah* gingerly, as if he expected a trick mechanism that might explode a bomb in his face.

"*Mashallah!* Where is the woman?" he exclaimed.

I found out then that I was right as to the way to play that supposititious poker hand. Grim had doped him out too, and answered promptly without changing a muscle of his face.

"*Wallahi!* Should I bring my wife to this place?"

"Allah! *Thy* wife?"

"Whose else?"

"It was Ali Higg's wife according to the tale!"

"Some fools swallow tales as the dogs eat the offal thrown to them! By the beard of God's Prophet, whom do you take me for?"

"*Kif?** How should I know?"

"Go and ask the kites then at Dat Ras!"

"You are he? You are he who slew the—*Shi ajib!*† Now I think of it, they did say he was beardless. Nay! Are you— Speak! Who are you?"

"Does your wife wander abroad while you herd cattle?" Grim asked him.

"Allah forbid! But——"

"Is my honor likely less than yours?"

"Then you are Ali Higg?"

"Who else?"

"And these?"

"My servants."

"Your honor travels abroad with a scant escort!"

"Let us see, then, whether it is not enough! A tale was told me of a black-faced liar on a Bishareen dromedary who fled hither from El-Kalil last night to persuade the dogs of this place to bark in some hunt of his. There was mention made of a woman. My men pursued him along the road, but fear gave him wings. Hand him over!"

"Allah! He is my guest."

"Or let us see whether I can not fire one shot and summon enough men to eat this place!"

"That is loud talk. They tell me you travel with but twenty."

"Try me!"

You didn't have to be much of a thought-reader to know what was passing in that sheikh's mind. Supposing that Grim were really the notorious Ali Higg, he might easily have left Hebron with twenty men and have been joined by fifty or a hundred others in the night. Or there might be others on the way to meet him now. It was a big risk, for Ali Higg's vengeance was always the same; he simply turned a horde of men loose to work their will on the inhabitants of any village that defied him. The sheikh was not quite sure yet that he really sat face to face with the redoubtable robber, yet did not dare put that doubt to the test.

"Is that all your honor wants?" he asked. "Just that messenger?"

"Him and his camel—and another thing."

"What else then? We are poor folk in

*What?
†This is strange!

this place. There has been a bad season. We have neither corn nor money."

"If I needed corn or money I would come and take them," Grim answered. "I have no present need. I give an order."

"Allah! What then?"

"It pleases me to camp yonder."

He made a lordly motion with his head toward the west.

"This side your village, then, all this day until sundown, none of your people venture."

"But our camels go to graze that way."

"Not this day. Today yours graze to the eastward."

"There is poor grazing to the eastward."

"Nevertheless, whoever ventures to the westward all this day does so in despite of me, and the village pays the price!"

"Allah!"

"Let Allah witness!" answered Grim.

And his face was an enigma, but half the puzzle was already solved because there was no suggestion of weakness there. It was the best piece of sheer bluffing on a weak hand that I had ever seen.

"Will your honor not visit my town and break bread with me?" asked Mahommed Abbas.

"If I visit that dung-hill it will be to burn it," Grim answered. "Send me out that black-faced liar and the Bishareen. I am not pleased to wait long in the sun."

"If we obey the command, do we not merit your honor's favor?"

That was a very shrewd question. A weak man with a weak hand would have walked into that trap by betraying the spirit of compromise. On the other hand, an ordinary bluffer would have blundered by overdoing the high hand.

"Consider what is known of me," Grim answered. "How many have disobeyed me and escaped? How many have obeyed and regretted it? But by the beard of Allah's Prophet," he thundered suddenly, "I grow weary of words! What son of sixty dogs dares keep me waiting in the desert while he barks?"

Mahommed Abbas did not like that medicine, especially in front of all his men. But they had ceased circling long ago and were waiting stock-still at a respectful distance; for the name of Ali Higg meant evidently more to them than the honor of their own sheikh—which at best depends on the sheikh's own generalship. It was a safe bet that if he had called on them to attack that minute they would have declined.

So he gave the dignified Arab salute, which Grim deigned to acknowledge with the slightest possible inclination of the head, and led his men away.

"What would you have done if he had called your bluff?" I asked Grim, as soon as they were all out of earshot.

"Dunno," he said, smiling. "I've learned never to try a bluff unless I'm pretty sure of my man. That guy don't own many chips. As a last resort I'd have had to admit I'm a Government officer—if they hadn't killed us all first!"

We sat our camels there for about three-quarters of an hour before half a dozen of Mahommed Abbas' men appeared with Rafiki's messenger riding the Bishareen between them. His face when they handed him over was the color of raw liver, and if ever a man was too scared to try to escape it was he. Ali Baba's two sons got one on either side of him without making him feel any better, for he, too, was a Hebron man and knew them and their reputation. There was nothing improbable about their throwing in their lot with the greater robber Ali Higg.

Then the sheikh's men tried to load gifts on Grim—chickens, a live sheep, melons, vegetables and camel-milk in a gourd. Grim did not even deign to acknowledge them in person, but made a gesture to Narayan Singh, who promptly took charge of the prisoner himself and sent Ali Baba's sons back for the presents. They had the good grace to find fault with everything, vowing that the sheep especially was only fit for vultures. However, with a final sneer or two anent the donor's manners they bore sheep and all along behind us back to camp.

"Is it well?" called Ali Baba, watching on the ridge of a dune, and coming to life like a heron as soon as we drew near.

"All's well," said Grim.

"Father of cunning! What now?" the old man answered.

## CHAPTER V

*"Let that mother of snakes beware!"*

THE terms that Grim had imposed on Abbas Mahommed were perfectly well understood by every one concerned. The Arab is an individualist of fervid likes and dislikes, and the thing that perhaps he hates

most of all is to be observed by strangers; he does not like it even from his own people. So there was nothing incomprehensible, but quite the reverse, about that requirement that none from the village should trespass in our direction all that day. And, of course, only a bold robber conscious of his power to enforce them would have dared to insist on such terms. But it was a good thing that Mahommed Abbas did not call the bluff.

As it was, we slept all morning undisturbed, with only four watchers posted, relieved at intervals of one hour. And the only disturbance we suffered was from the lady Ayisha, who insisted that the black-faced prisoner was hers, camel and all, and that he should be taken to Petra for summary execution. She threatened Grim with all sorts of dire reprisals in case he should let the man go.

But setting every other consideration aside, the man would have been dangerous company on the journey. He was putting two and two together in his own mind, and was not nearly as frightened as he had been. Back in Hebron he could do no harm, for once the Dead Sea should be behind us it would not matter how many people knew of Grim's errand, since we should travel faster than rumor possibly could across the desert.

But if he should get one chance to talk with the lady Ayisha's men, and even cause them to suspect that Grim might be in league in some way with the British authorities, it would be all up with our prospect of deceiving folk in future. There was danger enough as it was that one of Ali Baba's men might make some chance remark that would inform Ayisha or her escort.

Grim decided finally to let the man escape and gave Narayan Singh and me instructions how to do it. But first he satisfied Ayisha by giving loud orders to every one to watch the man, and by telling her that he didn't care what she did with him after we reached Petra. Then, late in the afternoon when Mujrim had rounded up the camels, a dispute was intentionally started about an old well, and whether a good trail to the southward did not make a circuit past it. The prisoner was asked, and he said he knew the well. Grim called him a father of lies, which he certainly was, and sent him off on the worst of the camels between Narayan Singh and me to prove his words. Ali Baba kept the Bishareen.

He led us a long way out into the desert among lumpy dunes in which the salt lay in strata, and where no sweet-water well could possibly be, or ever could have been. It was pretty obvious that all he wanted was a chance to escape from us, and he began offering bribes the minute we were out of sight of the camp.

The bribes were all in the nature of promises, however. He hadn't a coin or a thing except the clothes he wore, Ali Baba's gang having attended to that thoroughly.

"The wool-merchant my master is a rich man," he urged. "Let me go and he will be your friend forever after."

"We have no need of friends," Narayan Singh answered. "This man and I, being spies in the Government service, on the other hand, are men whose friendship is of value. You can serve us in a certain matter."

"Then give me money!" he retorted instantly. "He who serves the Government nowadays receives pay."

"The way to receive pay," said I, "is to take this letter to the Governor of Hebron, who will then know that a certain man is pretending to be Ali Higg. Thus you will do the Government a great service, and may receive the difference in price between the Bishareen camel and that mean brute you ride now."

"We waste time. There is no well out here. Give me the letter!"

He was gone in a minute, headed straight for Hebron, and Narayan Singh and I fired several shots in the air to let Ayisha know what a desperate pursuit we had engaged in. When we rode into camp again, trying to look shame-faced, they had about finished packing up, so Grim had time to call us terrible names for Ayisha's benefit—names that it would not have been safe to apply to any of Ali Baba's men if he had chosen them for the job.

Those thieves would stand for any kind of deviltry, and were willing to undertake all risks at Grim's bidding. Jail, fighting—hardship meant to them no more than temporary inconvenience. But to have asked them to let a prisoner escape, and submit to shameful abuse for it afterward in the presence of a woman and strangers, would have been more than Arab loyalty could stand.

And mother of me! How that woman Ayisha did revile us! If ever she had doubted we were Indians, she was sure of it now. She swept with her tongue the whole three hundred million Indians into one vile horde and de-sexed, disinherited, declassed and damned the lot of us. Before you think you know anything about abuse, wholesale or retail, you should hear a lady of the desert proclaim displeasure. I wouldn't be surprized to know that the very camels blushed.

It was all Narayan Singh could stand, for Ali Baba and his gang laughed derisively, and no true son of the East can endure to be laughed at.

"Let that mother of snakes beware!" he growled in my ear; and as it turned out in the end, he did not forget the grudge he owed her.

We were off again a good hour before sundown, and Mahommed Abbas sent out a screen of camel-men to follow us for several miles. They fired about twenty shots when we were well out of range, and boasted, as we learned afterward, of having put Ali Higg and a hundred men to rout.

But that did no harm. It reduced the real Ali Higg's prestige for a while all over the countryside; and in these days of Leagues of Nations and mandates and what not it is hard enough in all conscience for brave villagers with muskets to find something to make up songs about. De Crespigny knew the truth about it as soon as our "escaped" man got to Hebron.

BEFORE midnight we were well south of the Dead Sea and far beyond the border up to which the British mandate was supposed to be going to extend whenever the League of Nations Council should stop arguing. We were something like two thousand feet below sea-level now; but, although the heat all day long under the tents had been almost intolerable, the night air was actually chilly because of the tremendous evaporation. The earth was throwing off the heat it had absorbed all day, and chill drafts crept from the mountain-tops to take its place.

And as we crossed the imaginary border in pure, mellow moonlight with our three bells clanging you could have told its approximate whereabouts by the change that came over the gang. Even Grim's back, away ahead on the leading camel, assumed a jauntier swing. Old Ali Baba, next ahead of me, began to look ten years younger, and his sons and grandsons started singing—about Lot's wife acceptably enough, for we were near the fabled site of Sodom and Gomorroh, and the Prophet of Islam, who had nothing if not an eye for local color, incorporated that old story in the Koran.

The pillar of salt that used to be called Lot's wife, and that "stood there until this day," when the Old Testament writer penned his narrative, has fallen into the Dead Sea in recent memory. But all that did was to set loose imagination that had hitherto been tied to one landmark, and Ali Baba pointed out to me a dozen upright piles of argillaceous strata glistening in moonlight, every one of which he swore was either Lot's wife or one of her handmaidens.

"Such should be the fate of many other women," he asserted piously. "It would save a deal of trouble."

The Lady Ayisha heard that remark, and the things she said for the next ten minutes about men in general and old Ali Baba in particular were as poisonous as the brimstone that once rained down on Sodom and Gomorroh. She seemed to have no sense of being under obligation for the escort, but rather to think we were all in her debt for the privilege—a circumstance which appeared to me to bode ill for the manners of the gentry we proposed to visit.

Thereafter—I suppose since she considered she had utterly routed and reduced me to submission after the messenger's escape—she summoned me to her side, thrusting the *shibriyah* curtains apart and beckoning with the fingers turned downward, Bedouin fashion. We conversed quite amicably for more than an hour, she mocking my Arabic pronunciation, but asking innumerable questions about India—who my mother was, for instance, and whether my father used to beat her much; what physic was used in India for date-boils; why I had not stayed at home; wasn't I afraid of meeting Ali Higg; and were there such great ones as he in India?"

So, as there wasn't one chance in ten million of her knowing anything at all about India, I saw fit to explain that as a cockroach is to Allah, so was Ali Higg to dozens of Indian bandits I had known. I told her tales of men's heads piled mountains high,

and of roads of corpses over which rajas drove their chariots; of arenas full of tigers into which living prisoners were thrown once a week; and of a sheer cliff more than a mile high, over which women were tossed to alligators.

She took it all in, but doubted demurely at the end of it whether all those princely Indian terrorists added together could, as she put it, "reach to the middle of the thigh of Ali Higg!"

I asked her how she had come to marry the gentleman, and she answered with becoming pride that he had plundered her from the Bagdad caravan; but I think she meant by that a caravan of Bedouins on their way from Bagdad to wherever the grazing and thieving were good. She had a way of her own of enlarging things. Finally she asked me whether I carried good poison in my chest of medicines, and I told her I had some that could reach down to hell and kill the ifrits.

"*Wallah!*" she answered. "If you two eunuchs hadn't lost that prisoner we could have tested some of it on him!"

After that she dismissed me, I suppose that she might meditate on poison in the moonlight. I rode forward to take counsel with Grim, and some time during the night she got word with one of Ali Baba's younger sons. We had hardly camped an hour after dawn in the red-hot foot-hills east of the Dead Sea when Narayan Singh caught him rifling my chest, and he had the impudence to ask which were poisons and which not. Narayan Singh threatened an appeal to Grim, and the man apologized; but I saw Ayisha giving him sweetmeats in her tent not long afterward.

She had none of the ordinary Moslem woman's notions of privacy. A whole Bedouin family will live in a black tent ten by twelve, and though she had picked up wondrous ideas of high estate since her infancy, the desert upbringing remained. Her tent was pitched each day in the midst of ours, and she ordered every one about, Grim included, as if we were her husband's purchased slaves. And because it was Grim's idea to make use of her to gain access to her husband we all put up with it, fetching and carrying without a murmur—that is to say, all except one of us.

Whenever Narayan Singh had to do her bidding his great black beard rumbled with discontent; and as that only amused her she ordered him about more than any one; the others aiding and abetting by inventing things for him to be told to do. But it hardly paid her in the long run.

ON THE third day, when we camped by an old well that Ali Baba swore was the identical one made by the angel Gabriel to provide water for Hagar and Ishmael—there are twenty or thirty of those identical wells in Palestine alone, to say nothing of Arabia—she began to take a particular fancy to Grim and to treat him with more respect, giving him the title of prince on occasion, and abusing the men for not attending more swiftly to his needs.

Now, whatever the alleged custom of other lands may be—and I refuse to be committed on that point—there is no doubt whatever about the East. There it is the woman who makes the first advances. Grim took to sleeping in a tent with Mujrim and Ali Baba.

Considering the customs of that land—the savage, accepted way in which women swap owners when tribes are at war, and between times when the raids are made on caravan routes—it would be altogether wide of the mark to blame her too severely. Grim is a good-looking fellow, even in the khaki officer's uniform that makes most Christians look alike. Disguised as an Arab he takes the eye of any man, to say nothing of women.

The lines of his face are just deep enough to accent the powerful curve of his nose and chin; and his eyes with their baffling color arrest attention. Then he stands, too, in that gear like a scion of an ancient race, firmly, on strong feet, with his head held high and arms motionless—not fidgeting with one or both hands, as white men usually do. The wonder really is that Ayisha did not betray her designs on him sooner.

Narayan Singh grew as nervous as a hen in the presence of snakes, for he foresaw how Grim's star would surely wane from the moment any such woman as Ayisha should establish a claim on him; and he did not quite realize the full extent of Grim's resourcefulness in making the most of a situation. Old Ali Baba's advice, on the other hand, was just what he would have given to any of his sons.

"Let Ali Higg keep his wives within reach if he hopes to call them his! *Wallah!* I

would laugh to see the Lion of Petra tearing his clothes with rage for such a matter as this!"

And all the gang agreed.

Ayisha began to question Grim openly about his home and belongings. She wanted to know how many wives he had, and he told her none, which made her all the more determined. If he had affected squeamishness she would have despised him, and that would have been the end of her usefulness; for scorn is very close indeed to hate, and hate to spitefulness in the land where she was raised. But he did nothing of the sort. He was as frank as she was, and did his fencing, as you might say, with a club.

"The desert is full of women!" he told her on one occasion when she made more than usually open overtures.

"But not such as I am!"

"A woman's heart lies under her ribs, and who shall read it?" he answered.

"A pig can read some things!" she retorted; for he always managed to keep just clear of the point where frankness might have merged into poetry.

Her own four armed attendants seemed to take the whole affair rather speculatively. She was probably in position to have them crucified on her return to Petra in case they should offer unacceptable advice. And it may be they would have looked favorably on the chance to transfer allegiance from Ali Higg to Grim, who had crucified nobody yet; as Ayisha's servants they would doubtless go with her, should she change owners.

She asked me repeatedly for love-potions, to be slipped into Grim's food or into his drink, and was so importunate about it that, after consulting Grim, I gave her some boric powder. The next morning Grim told her that her eyes were like a young gazelle's, so my reputation as a *hakim* rose several degrees.

"Is he mad?" growled Narayan Singh. "Ah! Each man has his weakness! He and I have played with death a dozen times, but I never knew him lose his head. So he is woman-crazed? What next, I wonder!"

The girl had lots of encouragement, for, not counting the younger men, who were —— bent for any kind of mischief and constantly egged her on, old Ali Baba spent half of each day in the tent expounding to Grim the ethics of such situations; and they were as simple as the code of Moses.

"Love thy neighbor's wife if she will let you. Defeat thy neighbor in all ways whenever possible. On these two hang all amusement and prosperity."

And Grim was much too wise to pretend to Ali Baba any other motive than expedience. It would not have paid to take the old rascal too much into his confidence, because most Arabs overplay their hand; but he did drop a hint or two; and from what he told me I should say it was Ayisha's persistent love-making that provided the first suggestion of a plan in his mind for bringing Ali Higg to terms.

But I'm sure the plan did not really take shape until we reached the sun-baked railway line that drags its rusty length behind wild hills all the way from Damascus down to Mecca.

Some say that the very steel of the rails is sacred, because it was built to carry pilgrims to the Prophet's tomb. But some say not. And those who lost the carrying trade on account of it, and the tribes that used to lie in wait in mountain passes for the Damascus caravan in the month of pilgrimage, say distinctly not. Between those two opinions there is a third, that of the gentry who declare it is a curse, to be turned back on the heads of those who use it.

DURING four nights we climbed unlovely hills, avoiding villages—to the disgust of Ali Baba's gang, who would dearly have loved to pick a quarrel somewhere and loot. They had a thousand excuses for taking another trail, declaring that Grim had lost the way or would lose it; that there was sweeter water elsewhere; or that the hills were not so steep and hard on camels. But the moon was nearly full by then, and Grim seemed to carry a map of the district in his head.

Whether he went by guesswork, or really knew, we turned up finally a few miles from El-Maan at the exact spot he had aimed for, and pitched camp soon after dawn within fifty yards of the track. There was no water in that place and the gang grumbled badly; but it was not long before the reason of his choice was fairly obvious.

Tracks across the desert have a way of curving from point to point, no more following a straight course than the cow-paths do in other lands. Where there is

a rock, or some peculiar conformation of the ground to attract attention men and beasts will head for it, attracted somewhat after the fashion of a compass needle by a lodestone or lump of iron.

There was a rock shaped like a flattened egg beyond the track, two or three hundred yards away from us. It stood all alone in a dazzling wilderness that was doubtless green at certain seasons of the year, but now was bone-dry and glittering with flakes of mica. Close beside that ran a track worn by camels and horses, and the shadow of that great rock in a weary land was plainly a halting-place.

Our men wanted to cross over and take advantage of the shade it would give as the sun climbed higher, but Grim refused to let them; whereat Ayisha went into a shrewish rage, and ordered her four men to take up her tent and pitch it over by the rock whether Grim permitted it or not. So they obeyed her, and Grim said nothing.

The rest of us set about cooking breakfast after the morning prayers were over. My prayer-mat was next Narayan Singh's, and it was interesting to hear him curse the Prophet *sotto voce* while pretending to vie with those robbers in fervid protestations of faith in Islam. But more than the Prophet he cursed Ayisha, praying to his Hindu pantheon to wreak all wrath on her.

It was a diluted pantheon, of course, because he was a Sikh; he wasn't able to call on as many animal-shaped gods with as many arms and teeth as a Bengali could have urged into action; but he did his best with the technical resources at his disposal.

Without pretending to be a judge of other men's creeds, I thought at the time that he made a pretty workmanlike hash of that lady's prospects, so far as his particular formula could do it. I jotted down some of his suggestions to the gods for future reference, and purpose to teach them to the U. S. Army mule-skinners next time this country goes to war.

While we were eating breakfast in a circle in front of the tents, all sticking our right hands into a common messpan and eating like wolves—you have to be awfully careful not to use your left hand, and unless you eat fast you'll get less than your share—there came five men on camels out of a *wady*—a shallow valley that lay like a cut throat with red rocks on its edge something over a mile away beyond the egg-shaped rock. They were armed—as everybody is in those parts who hopes to live—and in a hurry.

Ayisha and her people did not see them, because the great rock was in the way; but we left off eating to watch, and Grim went into his tent to use field-glasses without being seen. It is not unheard of for an Arab sheikh to use Zeiss binoculars, but it might make a stranger suspicious.

The five men came on at a gallop, sending up the dust in clouds like a cruiser's smoke-screen. They seemed to take it for granted that we were friends, for we were in full view and far outnumbered them, yet they did not check for an instant, and that in itself was a suspicious circumstance.

They came to a halt ten yards away from Ayisha's tent, and stared at her in silence, realizing apparently for the first time that they had come within rifle-shot of strangers. We could see her talking to them, but could not hear what she said. Perhaps that was as well. I think that even Grim with his poker face in perfect working order would have been flustered if he had been given time to think. The surprize when it came made him brace himself to meet it; and, once committed, he played with the sky for a limit as usual.

One thing was quite clear: Ayisha had made herself known to them, and they were properly impressed. They dismounted from their camels, and, after bowing to her as respectfully as any lord of the desert decently could do to a woman, they left their beasts kneeling and started all together toward us.

So Grim went out to meet them, even outdoing their measured dignity, striding as if the desert were his heritage. But he went only as far as the railway track, and waited; to have gone a step farther would have made them think themselves his superiors. Ali Baba, Mujrim, Narayan Singh and I went out and stood behind him at a properly respectful distance.

## CHAPTER VI

*"Him and me—same father!"*

EVERY detail of a man's bearing is watched carefully in that land. Every action has its value. The etiquette of the desert is more strict, and more dangerous to neglect, than that of palaces, although it is simpler and more to the point, being

based on the instinct of self-preservation.

The Arabs who approached us, having ridden straight into a trap for all they knew, for they had expected friends and found strangers, were even more than usually observant of formality. They were fierce, fine-looking fellows, possessed of that dignity that only warfare with the desert breeds, and they saluted Grim with the punctilio of men who know the meaning of a fight to a man who doubtless understands it too. A very different matter that to raising your Stetson on Broadway, with two cops on the corner and the Stars and Stripes floating from the hotel roof. They eyed Grim the while in the same sort of way that men who might be charged with trespass look at the game warden, waiting for him to speak first.

"*Allah ysabbak bilkhair!*" he rolled out at last.

"*Allah y'afik, ya Ali Higg!*" they answered one after the other.

And then the oldest of them—a black-bearded stalwart with extremely aquiline nose and dark-brown eyes that fairly gleamed from under the linen head-dress, took on himself the rôle of spokesman.

"O Ali Higg! May Allah give you peace!"

"And to you peace!" Grim answered.

I could not see Grim's face, of course, since I stood behind him, but I did not detect the least movement of surprize or nervousness. He stood as if he were used to being called by that name, but the rest of us did not dare look at one another. Once across that railway line we were in the real Ali Higg's preserves. It occurred to me at the moment as vastly safer to pose as the U. S. President in Washington.

Still, Grim had not actually accepted the situation yet. I held my breath, trying to remember to look like a product of Lahore University.

"We were on our way to El-Maan, O Ali Higg, not knowing that your honor had a hand in this affair."

"Since when is a lion not called a lion?" demanded Grim. "Who gave thee leave to name me?"

"Pardon, O Lion of Petra! But the woman yonder, boasting with proper pride that she is your honor's wife, bade us approach and pay respect."

On my left I heard Narayan Singh muttering obscenities through set teeth. On the right old Ali Baba wore a twinkle in a wicked eye; the rest of his face was as emotionless as the face of the desert; but when an old man is amused not even the crow's-feet can do less than advertise the fact.

"A woman's tongue is like a camel-bell," said Grim. "It clatters unceasingly, and none can silence without choking it. But art thou a woman?"

"Pardon, O Lion of Petra!"

There followed a long pause. When men meet in the desert it is only those from the West who are in any hurry to betray their business. There being an infinity of time, that man is a liar who proclaims a shortage of it. "Will the sun not rise tomorrow?" asks the East.

Grim stood like a statue; and, judging by my own feelings, who had nothing at all to do but look on, I should say that was a test of strength.

"Last week the train was punctual at El-Maan—three hours after sunrise," said the spokesman at last.

On lines where there is only one train a week it is not unusual for its arrival to be the chief social event on the countryside, but that hardly seemed to me to account for the way those five men had been driving their camels. However, as Grim knew no more of their business than the rest of us, and needed desperately to find out, he was careful to ask no questions.

No desert responds to the inquisitive folk who camp on its edge and demand to be told; but it will tell you all it knows if you keep quiet and govern yourself in accordance with its moods. The men who live in the desert are of the same pattern—fierce, hot, cold, intolerant, cruel, secretive, given to covering their tracks, and yet not without oases that are better than much fine gold to the man who knows how to find them. They enjoy a proverb better than some other men like promises.

"Allah marks the flight of birds. Shall He not decree a train's journey?" said Grim.

"*Inshallah*, Lion of Petra! The train will come, when that is written, and that which is written shall befall. It is said there are sons of corruption on the train, who bear much wealth with them.

"It were a pity to leave all the looting to those who got to El-Maan soonest. They who slay will claim the booty.

"Or does your honor intend to arrive

afterward and claim a share, leaving the labor to those who seek labor? In that case we crave permission to join your honor's party. It may be we can help enforce your honor's just demands, and be recompensed accordingly?"

"*Wallahi!*" Grim answered after a long pause. "Who sets himself to plunder trains without my leave? Have I been such short time in Petra that men doubt who rules here? Have I not said the train shall pass El-Maan and come thus far? Who dares challenge me? Do I wait here for nothing? Shall I be satisfied with a string of empty cars?"

The Arab turned and conferred for a moment with his four friends. They shook their heads.

"O Lord of the Desert," he said after a minute, "none has heard of this decree. Your honor's messenger may have failed or have fallen into bad hands on the way. Word has not come that you reserve this train for your own profit. There will be fifty men at El-Maan now waiting to slay certain passengers and plunder others."

Grim had evidently made up his mind and had set full sail on the course indicated. I confess I shuddered at the prospect; but I never saw a man look more pleased than Ali Baba, and Narayan Singh's face betrayed militant admiration. Nor have I ever heard such a streak of fulminous bad language as Grim swore then, calling earth and all its elements to witness the brimstone anger of a robber chief.

"Go ye," he thundered, "and tell those sons of swine that I say the train shall pass to this point. And as to what happens thereafter that is my affair. Bid any and all who choose to dispute my word to look first to their wives and goods. I have spoken."

The five men fell back a pace in consternation, no doubt partly affected for the sake of flattery; but they were quite obviously disconcerted.

"*Wallahi!* If we go on such an errand who shall save our lives? Who are we to come between wolves and their prey?"

"Say ye are my messengers," retorted Grim. "Let any touch a messenger of mine who dares."

"But they will not believe us."

"That is their affair. It is Allah's way to make blind those who it is written are to be destroyed."

"Nay, Lion of Petra, give a man to go with us—one whom they will know and recognize. Then all shall be well."

Have I ever said that Grim is a genius? He can take longer chances in a crisis with a more unerring aim than any man I ever knew. Surely he took one then.

"Nay," he laughed. "I will send them a woman. Let us see who will dare gain say the woman."

That was simply supreme genius. It even pleased Narayan Singh, since the tables were turned on Ayisha. The only reason she could possibly have had for telling these men that Grim was Ali Higg was to score off him, either by capturing him for herself, or in the alternative by ruining him for rejecting her advances. It was not clear yet which of the two she hoped to accomplish; perhaps, little savage that she was, she would have been content with either alternative and had simply chosen to force the issue.

At any rate Grim had passed the buck back to her. He sent me over to the rock to fetch her, and I found her smiling serenely, like the Sphinx, only with more than a modicum of added mischief.

"Woman, the Lion of Petra summons you," said I.

She laughed at that as if the world were at her feet—got up and stretched herself, and yawned like a lazy cat that sees the milk being set down in a saucer—straightened her dress, and nodded knowingly to her four men. She had evidently reached an understanding with them.

"I hasten to do my lord's bidding," she answered, and followed me back.

It calls for all your presence of mind to remember to walk in front of a woman who is addressed as often as not as princess; but if I had walked behind her they would have suspected me at once of being no true Moslem.

I returned and stood behind Grim, and she stood in front of him, so that I was able to see her face. It was as good as a show to see her swallow back surprize and wonder at him open-eyed, as he played the part she had foisted on him and loaded her with the responsibility.

"Go with these men, Ayisha, and tell those swine at El-Maan that I say the train shall pass unharmed as far as this point. Moreover, say that none may trespass. What shall take place here is my affair.

The range of my rifle is the measure of the line across which none may come.

"Stay with them, Ayisha, until the train leaves El-Maan. Then you may leave your camel and return hither on the train. That is my order."

She was bluffed. And she recognized it with a sort of dog-like glance of admiration. We had all her baggage for one thing, and it represented more wealth than any Bedouin woman would let go willingly.

Now if she were to reverse what she had said, and refuse to advertise Grim as Ali Higg, these five men and probably others would surely denounce her to her real husband. She had no choice. But she was sharp-witted, and made the most of the situation even so.

"Shall I go alone, my lord? Alone with these strangers?"

"Take two of your servants."

But what she wanted to make sure of was that Grim might not decamp with her baggage and leave her to face the consequences. It seems you can fall in love in the desert without putting too much faith in masculine nature.

"Nay, give me two men I can trust. Give me that and that one."

She selected old Ali Baba and me; and it was a shrewd choice, for unless Grim was a more than usually yellow-minded rascal he was surely not going to leave the captain of his gang behind. And no doubt she supposed I was valuable to Grim because of the friendly, confidential way in which he always treated me. In other words, she proposed to have two first-class hostages.

Grim gave her three. He sent Ali Baba, me and Mujrim, and mounted her on the Bishareen dromedary, that men might know she was one whom her lord delighted to honor. She tried to get a chance to whisper to him, but he was too alert and acted exactly as if he had known her all his life, needing no explanations or assurances.

SO OFF we nine rode beside the railway track, she leading since she was chief emissary, and the last I saw of Grim for a few hours he was squatting in the circle of remaining men, talking to them as calmly as if nothing had happened.

Well, there was nothing for me to do but ride forward and watch points. I was a hostage without responsibility.

If Ayisha should choose to turn on us and hand me over to the crowd at El-Maan I believed I would have wit enough to denounce her in return; and it might be that as a Darwaish I could claim immunity. Failing that, I found myself able to hope with a really acute enthusiasm that my shrift at the crowd's hands might be short. I did not want to be crucified, or pulled in pieces by camels; but if mine was to be the casting vote, of the two the camels had it.

There were other points to be considered. I had a rifle slung behind me, and two bandoleers. However, it was highly unlikely I would have a chance to use the rifle, which is an awkward weapon at close quarters when surrounded.

But hidden under my coat I had two repeating pistols and a knife. Since a man can't prevent himself from making plans when there is nothing else to think about, I made up my mind finally in case of trouble to let them take the rifle and the knife; they might then suppose me to be disarmed. After that, if the trouble should be due to Ayisha's treason, I would execute her, and shoot myself in the head with the same pistol rather than submit to torture.

At the end of the first mile I drew alongside Ali Baba and passed him my second pistol. It did not seem any of my business to advise him what to do with it beyond hiding it under his clothes. The old rascal's eyes glittered as his hand closed on it, and it seemed to me he understood; and so he did, but not what I intended.

I never got the pistol back. He understood that a fool and his repeater are soon parted. When I asked him for it afterward he vowed he had lost it, and called his son Mujrim in addition to Allah and Mohammed and all the saints to witness that he spoke virgin truth, and moreover that he never lied, and would rather die ten times over than play a trick on me.

I have heard since that he has become a very good shot with a repeating pistol, but has difficulty in stealing suitable ammunition.

Ayisha wasted no breath on conversation on the way, but whipped her camel to its utmost speed after the first mile, so that we had our work cut out to keep up with her. It's aggravating to ride a big beast and try in vain to overtake a little one; but she had been born to the game, and there wasn't a man in the party who could have won a race against her, whichever of the animals she

rode; for the camel knows quicker than a horse whether his rider understands the art or not. And art it is, as surely as painting or music—art that can be tediously learned in a degree, but must be born in you if you are ever to excel at it.

The desert was all red sand now and dreary beyond human power to imagine. The clouds of dust we kicked up followed us, and even the cloths we kept across our mouths and nostrils did not keep it out. You felt like a mummy riding a race in ——, and how the camels managed to breathe I can't guess. The sun on our right hand was just at the angle where it struck your eyes under the *kuffiyi*.

But I was the only one who seemed at all distressed by any of those inconveniences; the others accepted them as in the natural order of things, and my camel, realizing how I felt, galloped last in the worst of the dust.

El-Maan itself was a picture of green trees above a mud wall; but we did not visit it, for the station with its hideous red water-tanks was a mile and a half to the eastward of the place—a miserable, bleak, unpainted iron roof and buildings, with a place alongside that had once been a Greek hotel.

At present it looked like a camel-mart; but there were dozens of horses there too, gaudily turned out like the camels with red worsted trimmings on saddles and bridles. And as for the fifty men our five new acquaintances had spoken of, there were a hundred and fifty if one, all herded in groups, each with a rifle over his arm or slung across his shoulder.

Their talk ceased as we rode up along the track, and those who were on the platform—about half of them—eyed Ayisha with as much curiosity as a Bedouin taken by surprize ever permits himself to betray.

She did not give them much time for reflection, and wasted none whatever on conciliation, but affronted them from camel-back, having learned that method no doubt from her rightful lord and master. It was obvious from the first that they all knew her by sight.

"*Wallahi!* Good meat for the crows ye will all be presently! Has the Lion of Petra lost his teeth that jackals hunt ahead of him? Did the men of Dat Ras profit by coming between him and his prey? Go, look at Dat Ras and count the splinters of men's bones! So shall your bones lie—ye who tempt the wrath of Ali Higg!"

She rode along the line, showing her little teeth like pomegranate seeds in a sneer that would have made a passport clerk take notice; and her voice was raised to a shrill, harpy scream that rasped under the iron roof, so that none could have pretended he did not hear.

"The Lion claims this train! The Lion of Petra lies in wait for it at a place of his own choosing! Who dares forestall him? Who dares slay one passenger, or loot one truck? Who dares? Stand out, whoever dares, that I may take his name back to the Lion of Petra!"

Nobody did stand out. They all herded closer together, as if in fear that any one left on the edge of the crowd might be assumed to challenge her authority. Yet they looked capable of plundering a city, that company of stately cutthroats. Perhaps some of them had seen what actually happened when Ali Higg raided Dat Ras. Certainly they came from scattered settlements, on which Ali Higg could take detailed vengeance whenever it suited him.

"Ye know me! I wait here for the train. I shall ride on it to where the Lion of Petra waits. Who dares interfere with me or follow? Let him name himself! Who dares?"

Her savagery fed itself on threats, and increased as she felt herself grow mistress of the situation. Partly the primitive love of power, partly the animal instinct to subject and oppress—pride on top of that, and something of sex, too, glorying in giving orders to the self-styled sterner members—drove her to increasing frenzy.

And it was not fear alone that impressed the crowd and impelled it to obedience, for those highland Bedouins are after all too practical for that. We were but nine all told to their seven or eight-score, and they might have enforced the logic of that first, and left the threatened consequences for afterward, but for the appeal of the spectacular.

It bewildered them to be harangued so confidently by a woman—they who were used to watching women carry loads. There was something revolutionary about it that took their breath away, and swept their own determination into limbo.

As always, the men in the background, who felt they could avoid recognition, were the only ones who ventured to raise objection. One or two of them started to laugh, that being the best answer all the world

over to any threat, and if the laugh had spread that would likely have been the end of us. I had unslung my rifle and held it in full view resting on my thigh, being minded to look as murderous as possible, but she stole all my thunder by suddenly snatching the rifle away and drawing back its bolt to cock the spring with that almost effortless adroitness that comes of long use.

"Who laughs at the Lion of Petra's threat?" she screamed, raising herself in the saddle to survey the crowd. "Who laughs? He shall die by the hand of a woman! Who laughs, I say?"

But nobody wanted to die by a woman's hand; and nobody chose to slay the woman, because of the certainty of vengeance dealt by an expert in terrorism. I know I didn't doubt she would have used the rifle, and I don't suppose they did. If she couldn't be laughed out of countenance, the only alternative was bloodshed, and none dared show fight.

Old Ali Baba worked his camel closer, and because an Arab must boast at every opportunity, began to whisper in my ear.

"*Wallahi!* Was I not wise? It was I who told her if she wanted our Jimgrim she should tell the world she is his wife, and he the veritable Ali Higg! It takes an old man's tongue to guide the cleverest woman!"

THE train screamed then in the distance, and a Syrian station agent in tattered khaki uniform went through the wholly unnecessary process of letting down a signal. We got off the track and rode our camels round on to the platform. The crowd gave way before us, and Ayisha thrust herself this and that way among them, breaking up groups, striking me over the wrist with the stick she had for flogging the camel because I tried to regain the rifle.

By the time the rusty, creaking, groaning rattletrap of a train drew up there was not an element of cohesion left in the crowd. She knew too much to drive them away to where they might have regained something of determination, but let them stand there under her eye where they could see in herself the symbol of Ali Higg's ruthlessness. And not even the sight of the frightened passengers, in a panic because of tales that had been told them up the line, could restore their plunder-lust.

As a matter of fact that was a romantic little mixed train when you come to think of it. The Arab engine-driver, piloting his charge through no-man's land, where the bones of former train crews lay bleaching, simply because he was an engine-driver and that was his job; the freight in locked steel cars consigned by optimists who hoped it might reach its destination; the four guards armed with worn-out rifles that they did not dare use; the four passenger cars with their window-glass all shot away; the half-dozen Arab artizans carried along for make-shift repairs *en route;* and the more than brave—the too-fatalist-to-care-much passengers wondering which of their number had an enemy at every halting-place; and along with that the formalism—the observance of conventions, such as blowing the whistle and pulling down the signal, on a track that carried one train one way once a week; it made you feel like taking off your hat to it all, reminding me in a vague way of those Roman legionaries, who kept up the semblance of their civilization after the power of Rome had waned.

I rode over beside the engine-driver and warned him to pull out before trouble started. But he had to take in water first. And he seemed to be an expert in symptoms of lawlessness. Leaning his grimy head and shoulders out of the cab, he looked the crowd over, spat, and showed his yellow teeth in a grin that vaguely reminded me of Grim's good-humored smile.

"*Mafish!*" he remarked, summing up the situation in two syllables. "Nothing doing!"

I would have given, and would give now, most of what I own for that man's ability to pass such curt, comprehensive judgment without reservation, equivocation or hesitation. I rather suspect that it can only be learned by sticking to your job when the rest of the world has been fooled into thinking it is making history out of talk and treason.

There was nothing whatever but water for the train to wait for. Nobody had business at El-Maan, for the simply sufficient reason that you can't do business where governments don't function, where all want everything for nothing, and whoever could pay, won't.

The engine-driver's grimier assistant swung the water-spout clear and climbed back over the cab, cursing the view, crowd, coal-dust, prospect—everything. He meant

it, too. When he said he wished the —— might pitch me into —— and roast me forever he wasn't exaggerating. But I got off my camel and boarded the engine, nevertheless.

Ayisha had handed over her mount to Ali Baba and entered the caboose, ignoring the protests of the uniformed conductor who, having not much faith in fortune, did not care whom he offended. But he might as well have insulted a camel as Ayisha, for all he would have gained by it.

My friend the engine-driver blew the whistle; somebody on the platform tooted a silly little horn; a signal descended in the near distance and we started just as I caught sight of Mujrim coming to take my camel.

Then it occurred to some bright genuis that even if they might not loot the train there was no embargo on rejoicing; and there was only one way to do that. What they saw fit to rejoice about I don't know, but one shot rang into the air, and a second later fifty bullets pierced the dinning iron roof.

That made such a lovely noise and so scared the passengers that they could not resist repeating it, and by the time we had hauled abreast of the distance signal there was not much of the roof left.

I saw Ali Baba and Mujrim take advantage of the excitement to start back with the camels; and two minutes later about twenty men decided to follow them at a safe distance. The rest had begun to scatter before the train was out of sight, and I never again saw one of the five gentry who had introduced us to the whole proceedings.

Then my friend the engine-driver found time to be a little curious.

"What'n ——?" he asked, in the *lingua franca* that all Indians are supposed to understand.

So I answered him in the mother argot at a venture, and he bit.

"There's a man down the line a piece who'll blow your train to ——," said I, "unless you pull up when he flags you."

"Son of a gun, eh?"

"Sure bet!"

"Where you learn English?"

"States," said I. "You been there too?"

"Sure pop! Goin' back sometime."

"Not if you don't stop her when you get the hint, you won't. That guy down there ahead means business."

I don't think he would have dared try to run the gantlet in any case, for the best the engine could do with that load behind it was a wheezy twenty miles an hour, and the track was so out of repair that even that speed wasn't safe. I was willing to bet Grim hadn't lifted a rail or placed any obstruction in the way, but the driver had no means of knowing that.

"Son of a gun, eh?" he repeated. "What in ——'s 'e want?"

"Nothing, if you pay attention to him. All he hankers for is humoring. He wants to talk."

"Uh! What in ——'s a matter with him?"

"Nothing, but he'll put a crimp in your machinery unless you stay and chin with him."

"I give him dry steam. He'll run like ——."

"Don't you believe it. He's wise. Better humor him."

"Shucks! I shoot him. I shot lots o' men."

"No need to shoot," said I. "This is love stuff. He's got a lady in the last car."

"Oh, gal on the train, eh? All right. You climb back along the cars an' kick her off soon as you see him."

"Gosh! I'd sooner kick a nest of hornets!"

"You her brother?"

"Not so's you'd notice it."

"What then?"

"She's got my gun. Barring that we're not real close related."

"Uh! Those —— Bedouin fellers can't shoot for nuts. Let 'em fire away. I take a chance."

"Ever hear of Ali Higg?" I asked him.

He turned his head from peering down the blistering hot track, wiped the sweat from his face and hands with a filthy rag, and looked at me keenly.

"Why? You know him?"

"Yes. I asked if you do."

"Son of a gun! Him and me—same father!"

"You mean he's your brother?"

He nodded.

"He's the man you've got to pull up for."

"His gal on the train?"

"Sure thing."

He resumed his vigil, leaning over the side of the engine with one hand on the throttle-lever.

"All right," he said. "I stop for him.

Son of a gun! If he bust my train I kill the sucker!"

I never posed as much of a diplomatist, but it seemed wise to me in the circumstances not to offer any further information or ask questions. But I was curious. It was possible that Ali Higg's brother had been given the task of running that train for the reason that no lesser luminary would have one chance in a thousand of reaching the destination.

I never found out whether my guess was right or not, and never left off rating that engine-driver in any case as one of the world's heroes. I've a notion there is a book that might be written about him and his train.

A POLISHED black dot in the distance soon increased into the flattened egg-shaped rock, and then we saw Grim standing on the track with all his men. That is the safest place to stop a train from, because you avoid a broadside from the car-windows. True to his word the driver came to a standstill, and Grim came up to speak with him just as I jumped off. I waited, expecting to see a *contretemps*.

"Ya Ali Higg! You ——!" said the driver. "You would kill your own brother? You let me go!"

"Hah! You recognize me, then?" said Grim, coolly enough on the surface.

But his poker mask was off. In that land of polygamy and deportations it is frequent enough that one brother does not know the other by sight; but it must be disconcerting all the same, to have a supposititious brother sprung on you. He gave a perceptible start, as he had not done when first addressed as Ali Higg that day.

"*Mashallah!*" swore the driver. "I would know thine evil face with the meat stripped off it! Nevertheless, thou and I are brothers and this is my train. So let me go!"

Grim watched Ayisha jump out of the caboose with my rifle in her hand, and turn to take aim at the open door, through which the conductor's voice came croaking blasphemy.

"All right," he said. "Since thou and I are brothers, go thy way! *Allah ysallmak!*"

The driver did not wait for a second hint, but shoved the lever over so hard that the wheels spun and the whole train came within an ace of bucking off the track. And before the caboose had passed us Ayisha was alongside Grim abusing him for not having broken the locks off the steel freight cars.

"I am a robber's wife!" she said, stamping her foot indignantly. "What sort of robber are you that let such loot pass free?"

"Shall I rob my mother's son?" Grim asked her. "God forbid!"

Then he turned to me, wondering.

"Can you beat it?" he said.

## CHAPTER VII

*"You got cold feet?"*

WE DID not have to wait long for Ali Baba, Mujrim and the camels, for they had not been fools enough to dawdle, with a hundred and fifty balked freebooters within rifle-shot, whose resilient pride was likely to breed anger. You can't lead camels any more than horses as fast as you can ride them; unless stampeded they tow logily; but the fact that two or three dozen mounted Arabs had elected to follow along behind and watch from a safe distance what might happen to the train had lent Ali Baba wings.

And the same fact gave us wings, too. We were up and away at once, headed eastward toward Petra, I perched on top of a baggage beast until Ali Baba could cut across at an angle and overtake us.

So those who watched no doubt confirmed the story of Ali Higg's presence on the scene. Had they not from the horizon seen the train stopped? Did they not with their own eyes see us scoot for Petra? And who else than the redoubtable Ali Higg would be likely to own such a string of splendid camels—he who could take what he coveted, and never coveted anything except the best?

The evidence of identity was strong enough for a judge and jury. Men have been hanged in America on less.

But that didn't help make the rest of our course any clearer than a fog off Sandy Hook. The real Ali Higg was in Petra like a dragon in a cave, and from all accounts of him he was not the sort of gentleman likely to lavish sweet endearments on a rival who had stolen not only his thunder, but his name as well.

When in doubt go forward is good law; but which is forward and which backward when you stand in the middle of a circle of doubt, is a point that invites argument; and

as soon as I could get my own camel I rode up beside Grim to find out whether our leader had a real plan or was only guessing.

But he seemed in no doubt at all, only satisfied, with the air of a scientist who has at last found the key to a natural puzzle. I found him chuckling.

"That explains a hundred things," he said.

"What does?"

"Why, my likeness to Ali Higg. It's evidently so. I've often been kept awake wondering why strangers—Bedouins mostly—would show me such deference until they found out who I really am, and after that would have to be handled without gloves. It bothered me. It looked as if I had some natural gift that I couldn't identify, and that got smothered as soon as I put mere brains to work.

"But I see now; they mistook me for the robber, and the reaction when they found out I was some one less like the devil made them act like school-kids who think they can guy the teacher. Now I understand, I'll do better."

"The point is," said I, "that you're established as the robber now, and here we are riding straight for his den. Can we fight him and his two hundred?"

"Fighting is a fool's game ten times out of nine," he answered. "That's to say, it's always a fool who starts the fight. The wise man waits until fighting is the only resource that's left to him."

"Why not wait then, and watch points?"

"Because we're not dealing with a wise man; he's only clever and drastic. If we wait, word's bound to reach him that some one's posing as himself, and he'll sally forth to make an example of us—do a good job of it, too!

"I'd hate to be caught out in the desert with twenty men by Ali Higg! He's a rip-roaring typhoon. But the worst typhoon the world ever saw had a soft spot in the middle.

"You know what the Arabs say? 'A dog can scratch fleas, but not worms in his belly!' We've got to be worms in the belly of Ali Higg, and where the man is there will his belly be also. We've got to stage what the movie people call a close-up."

Almost every one in the outfit had a different view of the situation, although all agreed that Grim was the man to stay with. Narayan Singh, growling in my ear incessantly, scented intrigue, and his Sikh blood tingled at the thought; he began to look more tolerantly on Ayisha as a mere instrument whom Grim would find some chance of using.

"For the cleverest woman whom the —— ever sent to ruin men is after all but a lie that engulfs the liar. I know that man Jimgrim. She will dig a pit, but he will not fall into it. It may be that we shall all die together, but what of that?"

Ayisha, on the other hand, was getting nervous. Grim avoided her. She was reduced to questioning others, edging the little Bishareen alongside each in turn. She seemed no longer able to suffer the close confinement of the *shibriyah* but endured the scorching sun and desert flies with less discomfort than the rest of us betrayed, camels included.

"What will he do? Is he mad? Does he think the Lion of Petra is a camel to be managed with a rope and a stick?

"I have given him his chance; because of my words men already fear him. Why doesn't he plunder, then, and run to his own home? Why doesn't he talk with me and let me tell him what to do next? I know all these people—all their villages—everything!"

"All women know too much, yet never what is needful," Ali Baba answered.

He was frankly jubilant. Son and grandson of robbers by profession, father and grandfather of educated thieves, life meant lawlessness to him, and he could see nothing but honest pleasure and the chance of profit in Grim's predicament. He loved Grim, as all Arabs do love the foreigner who understands them, deploring nothing except that unintelligible loyalty to a Western code of morals that according to Ali Baba's lights consisted of pure foolishness. And now, as he saw it, Grim stood committed to a course that could only lead to trickery. And all trickery must pave the way for plunder. And plundering was fun.

His sons and grandsons in varying degree saw matters from the old man's view-point, although, having had rather less experience of it, they were not quite so confident of Grim's generalship; but they made up for that by perfectly dog-like devotion to "the old man, their father," whose word and whose interpretation of the Koran was the only law they knew.

What tickled their fancy most was Ali

Baba's cleverness in egging on Ayisha to advertise Grim as Ali Higg. Again and again on the march that day, in spite of the grilling heat, and thirst and flies, they burst into roars of laughter over it, chaffing Ayisha's four men unmercifully.

And after a while Mahommed, the youngest of Ali Baba's sons, regarded by all the others as the poet of the gang and therefore the least responsible and most to be humored in his whims, made up a song about it all. It called for something more than boisterous spirits; it needed the fire of enthusiasm and ingrained pluck to set them all singing behind him in despite of the desert heat and the dazzling, bleak, unwatered view. They sang the louder in defiance of the elements.

"Lord of the desert is Ali Higg!
*Akbar!** *Akbar!*
Lord of the gardens of grape and fig.
*Akbar!* *Akbar!*
Lord of the palm and clustered date.
*Mishmish,*† olive and water sate
Hunger and thirst in Ali's gate!
*Akbar!* *Akbar!* *Akbar Ali Higg!*

"Lion of lions and lord of lords!
*Akbar!* *Akbar!*
Chief of lances, prince of swords!
*Akbar!* *Akbar!*
Red with blood is the realm he owns!
Bzz-u-wzz-uzz the blood-fly drones!
Crack-ak-ak-ak! The crunching bones!
*Akbar!* *Akbar!* *Akbar Ali Higg!*

"Jackals feed on Ali's trail!
*Akbar!* *Akbar!*
Speed and strength and numbers fail!
*Akbar!* *Akbar!*
Swooping along in a cloud of sand,
Killing and conquering out of hand
Hasten the slayers of Ali's band!
*Akbar!* *Akbar!* *Akbar Ali Higg!*

"Camel and horse and fat-tailed sheep,
*Akbar!* *Akbar!*
Ali's kite-eyed herdsmen keep!
*Akbar!* *Akbar!*
Gold and silver and gems of the best,
Amber and linen and silks attest
What are the profits of Ali's quest!
*Akbar!* *Akbar!* *Akbar Ali Higg!*

"Fair are the fortunes of Ali's men!
*Akbar!* *Akbar!*
Each has slave-women eight or ten!
*Akbar!* *Akbar!*
Ho! Where the dust of the desert swirls
Over the plain as his cohort whirls,
Oho! the screams of the plundered girls!
*Akbar!* *Akbar!* *Akbar Ali Higg!*

*Akbar* means "great."

†*Mishmish*—apricot. In that land of drought and desolation the highest compliment you can pay a man is to call him lord of water and ripening fruit.

There was any amount more of it, but most of the rest was not polite enough for print, because the Arab likes to enter into details. It sounded much better in Arabic anyhow. And more and more frequently as the song grew lurid and they warmed to the refrain they made their point by changing the third Akbar into Jimgrim:

*"Akbar! Akbar! Jimgrim Ali Higg!"*

It suited their sense of humor finely to announce to the wind and the kites that Grim, the strict, straight, ethical American was a ravisher of virgins and slitter of offenseless throats, who knew no mercy—a man without law in this world or prospect of peace in the next.

WHEN we reached an oasis about noon—sweet water and thirty or forty palm-trees—and simply had to camp there because the camels were exhausted after a night and half a day of strenuous marching, they were still so full of high spirits that they had to work them off somehow; and unwittingly I provided the excuse.

I was on the lee side of a camel, opening a boil in Mujrim's leg with his razor, when I caught sight of one of the younger men trying to burgle the medicine-chest. I yelled at him, and naturally gashed my patient's leg, who rose in giant wrath and with enormous fairness smote the real culprit.

The resulting blasphemous bad language brought Ali Baba to the scene at once as peacemaker with all the gang behind him; and in a minute they had all joined hands, with Mahommed standing in the center, and were dancing like a lot of pouter-pigeons, singing a new song about Mujrim's leg, and a razor, and blood on the sand, and palm-trees, and a saint, and my superhuman ability to let daylight into the very heart of boils. You don't have to believe any one who tells you that Arabs haven't humor.

There were the ruins of half a dozen mud-walled huts near the spring in that oasis. There had once been a sort of rampart and a gate, but there was hardly enough of that left to show where it stood. The only building still quite intact was a stone tomb of about the height of a man, with a plastered cupola roof; and Ali Baba, who always knew everything, swore that was a great saint's grave and that there was much virtue

and good luck to be gained by praying inside the tomb. So they all took turns to go in and pray fervently—two-bow prayers as they called them—reciting thereafter such scripture as Ali Baba thought suitable and could remember.

Hunting about in the ruins, I found indubitable human bones. Ayisha, when asked about it, said that Ali Higg had raided the place several months ago and killed or captured every one.

"Because he is lord of the waters," she explained, and seemed to think that reason unassailable.

There was quite a dispute at that place as to who should stand first guard while the rest of us slept, but Grim settled it by casting lots with date-stones in a way that was new, but that seemed to satisfy every one—especially as the first watch fell to Narayan Singh and me.

"That is because the rest of us said our prayers," explained Ali Baba piously.

But I think it was really because Grim knew how to play tricks with the date-stones.

The Sikh and I kept making the circuit of the palm-trees and talking to keep each other from getting too sleepy, for there is no time when desire to sleep so loads you down as in the noon heat after a long march. You very often can't sleep then because of the very heat that makes you drowsy; but the glare has been so trying to your eyes that you yearn to shut them, and inertia sits on your spine and shoulders like a load of lead.

"Thou and I must watch that woman, *sahib*," said Narayan Singh. "Our Jimgrim will make use of her; but how shall he do that if her heart changes? As long as she hopes to snare him I am not afraid of her.

"But what if it should be she who grows afraid as we get nearer to Ali Higg's nest? A woman afraid is worse than a man with a dagger in the dark. Suppose she bolts to Ali Higg and lays information against us—what then?"

I tried to argue him out of his anxiety, because I wanted to sleep when my turn came. My habit of never looking for trouble is a lovely one until trouble starts; but the Sikh, being only a heathen, could not be persuaded; so I had to promise him that, turn about, four hours on and four off, he and I would watch Ayisha faithfully until such time as Grim should make other disposition of our services or there should be no more need.

"And I think, *sahib*, that it will be best to shoot or stab her without argument if she turns treacherous."

But I never stabbed or shot a woman yet. I have a loose-kneed prejudice against it. I said so.

"Then, *sahib*, if it be your turn on watch, and you detect treachery, summon me and I will send her to *Jehannum*." *

"I think we ought to speak to Jimgrim about it," I objected. "He might have other plans."

The Sikh turned that over in his mind during one whole circuit of the palm-trees, stroking his great beard with his right hand the while as if the friction would inspire his brain.

"Jimgrim will say she is a woman and therefore must not be killed in any event," he answered at last. "But that is of the nature of his error, all men suffering delusion in some form, since none is perfect. If we submit the problem to him he will answer wrongly; but we shall then have received orders, which as faithful men we must not disobey.

"As concerns ourselves, being men without specific orders on that point, the question is simple: Of that woman and that man, if the one must live and the other die, which shall it be? And I say Jimgrim shall live, if I die afterward even by his hand for it."

It sounded logical. The arguments with which an unselfish, honest fellow deceives himself into wrong-doing always do bear quite a lot of investigation. But I was at sea before the mast once, where I learned painfully that the captain commands the ship; not even the notions of the buckiest bucko mate amount to as much as a barnacle's bootlace if the old man disagrees from them.

"What makes you think he doesn't understand the obvious danger of Ayisha?" said I.

"No man from the West ever understood a woman of the East," he answered.

That being obviously true—Adam did not understand Eve, and no man from anywhere has understood any woman since—I had to rack my brains for a different argument.

"There are two sure ways of discovering

*Hell.

treason," I said at last. "One way is to pick a quarrel with the person you suspect. But the safer way is to seem very friendly.

"Now—why don't you make love to her? You're a fine, big, handsome man. I don't suppose she'll prefer you in her heart to Jimgrim, but she'll not be ashamed to appear to respond; and if she has evil intentions she will surely seek to take advantage of your passion to forward her own plans. Seeking to make use of you, she will betray herself."

"So speaks the jackal to the tiger. 'This way, *sahib!* That way, *sahib!* A broad-horned *sambhur* to be killed, worthy of your honor's strength!' Why don't you make love to her?"

"Because I'm afraid," said I quite frankly. "If I thought I could get away with it I'd try. But she'd laugh at me, whereas your attentions might flatter her."

"You think so?"

He stroked his great beard again, and twisted his mustache.

"I'm sure of it."

"*Atcha.* We shall see. I will give the trollop that one chance. It may be she will preserve her head on her shoulders yet by confiding in me; for if I can forewarn Jimgrim of her plans I will reckon it beneath my dignity to use a sword on her. So. It is settled. We shall see."

You know that warm glow of vanity that sweeps over you when another fellow concedes your plan to be better than his? It's rather like the effect of certain drugs—a highly agreeable sensation while it lasts.

But it was tempered in my case by that reference he had made to a jackal, and I'm still left wondering how much justice there was in the insinuation. Narayan Singh and I are friends right down to this minute, but I am none the less conscious of a query that seems to spoil confidence a little.

He, being master of himself by training, and used to sleeping when he saw fit, volunteered to take the first four-hour watch on Ayisha, so I got as much sleep as the flies and the snores of the rest of the gang would permit, and awoke toward evening to the sound of unaccustomed voices outside my tent. There was one voice with a squeak in it like a rusty wheel that I had certainly never heard before.

IT SEEMED we had made some prisoners. There were three seedy-looking camels kneeling over by Grim's tent, and three almost as seedy-looking individuals were talking to Grim in the midst of our camp, with most of our gang seated in a semi-circle listening. Grim had out his traveling water-pipe for the sake of effect, and was puffing away at it while he meditated on the information that was being drawn forth gradually. Ayisha was seated on the mat beside him.

The man with the squeak in his voice who did most of the talking was a very dark-skinned fellow with a short, coal-black, curly beard. He had little gold rings in his ears, and in spite of the filthy condition of his clothes he wore an opulent look—the sort that suggests intimate acquaintance with the fabled riches of the East. I have seen a Moor, who hadn't a coin with which to bless himself, create exactly the same impression by simply being dark and handsome.

He was eating dates while he talked, so I suppose Grim had been to some pains to make him feel welcome. But he hadn't been there long.

"*Wallahi!*" he said as I joined the circle. "But your honor is surely Ali Higg, and that is the lady Ayisha! Your honor is pleased to pretend otherwise, but am I blind? I, who come straight from Petra where your honor paid me, am not thus easily deceived!

"Lo, the good camels! It was easy to make a wide circuit and reach this place a day ahead of me; but what is your honor's purpose? What do you want with me, O Lion of Petra?"

"Nevertheless," said Grim, "I am not Ali Higg, who styles himself Lion of Petra."

"Is that not the lady Ayisha?" he retorted. "True, I have only seen you in the dark, but have I not seen her at the least ten times? Was it not she who had my servant flogged on a former occasion because he likened her to other women?"

Grim said nothing to that. Ayisha drew the embroidered head-cloth over her face, I suppose to hide a smile.

"For what purpose did you visit Petra?" Grim inquired.

"*Mashalla!* Did I not receive payment from your honor? I do not understand!"

"It is I who do not understand," said Grim. "Repeat to me what you did at Petra."

"But your honor knows!"

"Very well. Return with me to Petra. I have reasons for asking."

"*Wallahi!* If it suits your honor's humor to make me tell you a tenth time what I have nine times said already, I have a tongue that wags. But I see that another has been telling tales of me behind my back, making me out a liar for his own purposes. *Inshallah*, it shall be found that my tale varies by less than the ten-thousandth part of the width of a hair from that I have told already."

"Proceed," said Grim. "I listen."

"Thus then: While in Jaffa, having received your honor's letter by the hand of Shabbas Ah requesting me to spy on the British troops, I made all haste, laying aside my own affairs and journeying wherever the trail of information led me. I asked questions, but was not content with asking. I went and looked. I made friends with subordinate officials, some of whom I bribed to show me written orders removed from the desks of commanding officers.

"I ascertained all particulars and found this to be the fact: That, whereas there are small bodies of troops scattered in certain places, those are needed for local protection of the places where they are; and that whereas there is at Ludd an army of more than twenty thousand men, with guns, great store of supplies, cavalry and aeroplanes, that army is held in readiness to go to Egypt and can not for the present be sent against you. Moreover, the long march, so difficult for guns and supply-wagons, from there to Petra would not be attempted during the hot season. So your honor is safe from attack."

"Uh! So you say!" Grim grunted.

You could almost hear the wheels click inside his head as he tried to puzzle out what use to make of this man. One thing was clear enough: The Lion of Petra was well informed. It was nothing less than fact that on no account could an expedition be undertaken against him for a long time. And it was fair, therefore, to presume that in his Petra fastness the robber chief would be feeling confident, and would be that much more difficult to bluff.

But it is one advantage of that land that you may be deliberate without causing impatience or losing respect. Rather the contrary; the Arab values your decisions all the more for being reached after several minutes of silent thought.

Neither our own gang nor the prisoner was in the least disturbed by Grim's taking his time, and only Narayan Singh, still postponing his sleep, was anxious when Ayisha leaned her head close to Grim's and whispered. Grim did not nod or shake his head or make any recognition of her presence—for a real Arab would not have dreamed of doing so—but it was she who gave him the right suggestion, although her intention was totally different from his.

"You lie," he said suddenly.

"Allah!"

"There is an army making ready now to march on Petra."

"As Allah is my witness, there is no such thing."

"You shall return to Petra."

"But your honor knows I am in great haste. My own small affairs at Jaffa, God knows, have been neglected. How shall I spare time to return to Petra?"

"And there you shall reverse your story."

"Allah!"

"You shall tell the very numbers and equipment of the army that makes ready."

"May He Who never sleeps preserve me! Am I mad or dreaming? In Petra I have told your honor a true tale; shall I return to Petra in order to tell you a lie? O lord of the limits of the desert, listen to me! I have property in Jaffa; I must attend to it."

"I know you have. By the wharf where the Greeks land melons from Egypt, isn't it? Three godowns and a café on the corner? A nice property."

He paused, and I think he was turning over in his mind just how far it would be wise to go with all those others listening; for every word he let fall was sure to be discussed and discussed again at the next halting-place.

"Which is better—to return to Petra and obey; or to lose that property?"

"How shall I lose it? Hah! Your honor is pleased to joke! You will invade Palestine as far as Jaffa?"

"For those who live under British protection and yet spy against the British are not so well treated by them as those who spy on their behalf."

"Maybe. When they are caught! When they have caught a fox they may skin him."

"And I am *not* Ali Higg, the Lion of Petra."

"Then who in the name of the Prophet are you, with the Lion's wife at your side?"

"That is none of your business. You come back to Petra with me. No, not your men; they go on. You alone. I have spoken."

In vain the man protested. He did not believe for a moment that Grim was not Ali Higg, and he felt sure that he was being kidnaped for some frightful fate, although Grim's mildness of demeanor must have puzzled him; for according to accounts the real Lion of Petra was a roaring beast.

Grim assigned two men to watch him, and gave the order to strike camp, refusing to listen to any further argument. And since the man's camels were too exhausted to march at once, he ordered all three left behind at the oasis and put the prisoner on one of our baggage animals.

Just as we were ready to start he walked over to the two men and threatened them with frightful torture unless they hurried westward the minute the camels were fit to move on. It was pretty obvious that they were only too glad to obey; and Yussuf, our prisoner, made obedience more certain by shouting messages to them to be delivered to friends in Jaffa.

So Narayan Singh cast appraising eyes on the *shibriyah*, and curled up in it like a big dog without troubling to ask Ayisha's permission. Sleep was his first intention, but he was for killing two birds with one stone; I did not realize at the time what a chance that was going to provide for making the first advances to the lady.

I rode forward beside Grim, who guided us with a compass on his wrist until the stars came out; and for hours on end we went side by side saying nothing, listening to the monotonous jangle of his camel-bell and the *obbligato* of the bells behind. It was music that suited our mood, harmonizing perfectly with the solemn marvel of a desert sunset and the velvety, cool silence of the starlit night.

"That man Yussuf had me guessing," he said at last. "I couldn't place him. Knew his face, but that was all. Then she whispered something about his being a wind that carries smells from one village to the next and back again, spying against both sides at the same time.

"Then I remembered. He used to spy for us against the Turks, and sell them information about us at the same time. Nearly got shot for it, but was let off because his services had really been valuable. I remember his being sent down to Jaffa and told to stay put."

"But what in thunder are you going to do with him?" I asked. "He thinks you're Ali Higg."

Grim chuckled.

"Wonder what Ali Higg will say when he's confronted by Ali Higg!"

"Wonder what he'll *do*, you mean, don't you!"

"What d'you keep looking back for?"

"Just keeping tabs on Ayisha."

"No need to worry about her. Now we've got Yussuf on our string it's a cinch we can use her whichever way the cat jumps. She'll be afraid he'll tell tales about her."

"——!" I said. "It seems to me this whole procession's crazy! The best we've got with us is a gang of professional thieves.

"The farther we go the more we load up with sure-fire traitors. First Ayisha; she'd cut throats at so much per. Her four men, who'd change sides once an hour if they were made afraid that often. Now this Yussuf—a professional spy, whose habit you say is to betray both sides."

"Pretty good outfit, I'll tell the world," he answered.

"Good for what?"

"You got cold feet?"

"I've got cold judgment. We're crazy. We haven't a chance in a million of getting the best of an outlaw with two hundred men."

"We can try, can't we?"

"Yes, and die, can't we!"

"Well—we might do worse. I'd sooner croak in harness than have an eight-horse funeral. But say; if you don't like it you go back and join those two fellows at the oasis. There'll be no hard words."

But I felt too afraid of my own opinion of myself to turn back at that stage of the game.

## CHAPTER VIII

*"He cools his wrath in the moonlight, communing with Allah!"*

NOW the desert at full moon is as light as Broadway, and the only shadows are those the camels cast, than which there is nothing more weird in the whole range of phantasmagoria. We looked like a string of glistening ghosts accompanied by goblins of a fourth dimension mocking us, and though you couldn't see the details of men's faces, looking back along the line you *could*

see every movement and distinguish man from man.

About midnight Ayisha made up her mind to enjoy the *shibriyah*, more, I suspect for the sake of annoying the Sikh than because she really wanted it. So she ranged alongside, and chiefly because I was curious and chose to be amused, but partly because of my league with Narayan Singh to keep watch on her, I checked my protesting camel and let him drop back into place behind them.

I knew Narayan Singh was awake, for I had seen the glow of his cigaret through the curtains ten minutes before; but he pretended to be asleep, so that she had to get the camels flank to flank and put her hand inside the curtains to awake him.

Then he did the obvious thing and seized her hand, and I heard his bass voice answering her shrill protests. I don't know why, but the moonlight that made all things clear seemed also to make words more than usually distinct.

"Aha!" he boomed. "I dreamed of paradise. I awake and find a houri with her hand in mine! *Il-hamd'ul-illah!* * Enter, beloved! Why waste the moonlight hours?"

"Pig!" she retorted. "Father of bristles! Let my hand go!"

"Nay, lovely one! I awake—I see—I understand; thou art not a houri after all, but that same Ayisha I have loved in secret all these burning days! I, who had resolved that gold and honor were as feathers in the scale against thy kisses, am I blessed at last?"

"Cursed by black ifrits, thou son of an Afghan pig! Let me go, and get out of that *shibriyah!*"

"Such eyes! Behold, the moon is pale beside them, and the stars mere drops of sweat on the sky's dull cheek! Such loveliness as thine, beloved, needs a warrior to worship it—such a man as I, who would cut the throats of kings for a kind word from thee!"

Don't forget, you fellows who have to call on a girl a dozen Sunday evenings in succession before she will go to the movies or condescend to sit out a dance with you, that east of the fifteenth meridian the situation is reversed, and the man who wasn't swift about his wooing would stand no chance at all. Modesty of approach is reckoned a sure sign of unworthiness, and deference as cowardice that fears to seize an opportunity.

"An Indian lover and a boasting louse are one," she answered; but she laughed as she said it, and her voice had lost the shrill note.

"Hah! Try me," he retorted, tugging at her hand again, and whether or not she tried really hard to release it she failed. "Boasts should be put to the test, beloved! We of the North have a way of understating our performance. I would burn and lay waste cities for thy sake! Come!"

Her laugh struck a bell-like note now. There was a hint of pleasure in it, and more than a hint of thoughtfulness. You know those overtones of a bell that go fading away into the infinite, in touch somehow with thoughts that haven't reached any of us yet except the man who made the bell.

"Ah! Afghans are all alike!"

Sikhs say that of Afghans too, and Afghans say the same thing of the Sikhs.

"You would say anything for me; but as for cutting throats and laying waste, I myself would be the very first victim. Thy love, I think, would burn up and be ashes faster than the cities I should never see."

"Cities! I will take you to all the cities! You shall have your will of the richest! Covet pearls, and I will burn the feet of jewelers until they beg you to take their costliest! Covet rubies, and I will plunder them from the eyes of temple gods! Covet gold, and I will melt down the throne of a maharaja to make bracelets for your ankles!"

"*Wallahi!* You speak like a braggart."

"Braggart? I? Nay, I am a lover whose words go lamely. They are but chaff blown along the wind of great accomplishment. With thee to fight for I would dare the very rage of Ali Higg!"

He still held her hand. She waited about a minute before answering.

"Which Ali Higg?" she asked at last.

"Any Ali Higg! All Ali Higgs! As lions go down beneath the feet of elephants, so shall the Lion of Petra fail before me!"

"One at a time!" she laughed. "There is one Ali Higg who could command you with a word—another who could order your carcass thrown to the vultures. Words first, since your boastings are all words! I say that, for all your brave words, this Ali Higg who rides ahead of us can make you slay me for a word of praise from him."

"You mean, beloved, you could make me

*Thanks be to God!

slay him for a word of praise from you!" the Sikh lied glibly.

"But I might not want him slain."

"Have him made into a cripple then—a ruin of a man, for daring to displease you!"

"But he pleases me!"

"Aha! I am jealous! By the beard of the Prophet, Ayisha, beware of my jealousy! I am a man of few words but sudden deeds! Is there a man who stands in my way? May Allah show compassion on him, for he is like to need it!"

He was so fervid in his avowals that he almost convinced me—almost made me believe that his private agreement with me had been a camouflage for his real intentions.

There is precious little of which my friend Narayan Singh isn't capable in the way of romantic soldiering; he ought to have been born two or three hundred years ago as, in fact, according to his reincarnating creed he was. Perhaps he remembers past lives so vividly that he lives them over again. I wish I could remember a past life or two.

Ayisha was about to answer him when Grim's shrill bosun's whistle that he keeps for emergencies whined from in front, and the sleepy-looking line awoke with a start. Every single rifle down the length of the caravan, including mine, was unslung in a second and the click of the sliding bolts was as business-like as if we had been a squad on the parade-ground. Narayan Singh, rifle in hand, sprang on to Ayisha's little Bishareen, and she jumped into the *shibriyah*, like a pair doing stunts at the circus.

So far good. But the rest was amateurish. We milled badly. Grim away in front had halted to let the line close, and we swarmed around him like a herd of steers that smell wolves, and nobody seemed to know which way to look, or what to do next.

I was right in the midst of the mess with a camel on either side trying to get its teeth into me, and what with Grim's shouting to get the tangle straightened, and our all trying to obey at once, it was some minutes before I got the hang of things. In fact, I think I understood last.

We were already surrounded perfectly on three sides by camel-men who kept out of reasonable rifle-range and stalked us like dark ghosts from the rear. They resembled a drag-net, drawing us in the direction of Petra, and the only unblocked segment of the circle was exactly in front of us. Every time I tried to count them there seemed more than before, and there were certainly over a hundred.

I got one close look at Grim's face, and knew he had made his mind up what to do, but all the men were shouting different advice and it was a question whether he would be able to get control before a disaster happened. I said nothing and did nothing but keep fairly close to him. Narayan Singh found his proper place alongside me, with the halter of Ayisha's camel in his hand; and he said nothing either.

Suddenly Grim reached out and seized old Ali Baba by the shoulder, drawing him close and growling into his ear. I could not catch the words, but he repeated them again and again, and Ali Baba nodded vehemently. Not a shot had been fired yet, for Grim had forbidden it, and the other side showed no disposition to do other than surround us at a safe distance. But I noticed they were reducing their estimate of safety, and seemed to be gradually closing in for a concerted rush from all sides at once.

Then two things happened suddenly. Out of the open horizon in front, from between two great mounds that looked like ant-heaps, three figures emerged on camels, apparently all alone and unsupported. The one in the middle on the tallest camel made a signal with a long strip of cloth waved like a semaphore against the moonlight.

Instantly the opposing force began to close in, and Ali Baba proved his mettle. Those sons and grandsons obeyed his order as efficiently as he did Grim's. They made a feint all in a cluster together straight for the widest gap in the circle behind us.

The enemy drew off to a safer distance, whereat Ali Baba wheeled and charged another segment of the circle, widening it again. Still not a shot had been fired by either side.

Around Grim now were Narayan Singh, Ayisha and myself with our prisoner Yussuf and Ayisha's four. Grim watched his chance and sent me to bring back four of Ali Baba's men, and by the time I had done that he had lessened the distance perceptibly between himself and the three lone individuals in front. He was leaning low over his camel, peering at the three like a seaman staring from a crow's-nest in a fog.

It was a weird business—a swiftly played

chess-game, almost noiseless; for wherever Ali Baba charged the enemy drew off, while the rest came closer until they were charged in turn.

"It's obvious we're intended to be made prisoners," Grim said to me at last. "But I think it's obvious we're not going to be."

Nevertheless, I understood nothing of his plan except that our little group kept drawing closer to the three, one of whom seemed in command of the other side. At the moment I suspected that Grim was one of those officers who are splendid at intelligence work and at playing a lone hand, but less than ordinary in the field; Ali Baba looked like the man of action.

Why, with all that brave old man's ability to swing and spur his gang in absolute control, had not the lot of us burst through the circling enemy and made a bolt for it? That was what I would have done.

But suddenly Grim turned and pushed the muzzle of his pistol into Ayisha's face as she leaned out of the *shibriyah* to watch. It caught her under the jaw-bone, so that she could not see what his finger was doing, and did not dare try to move away.

"Now shout!" he ordered her. "Tell 'em your name *Wallahi!* Yell, or I'll kill you."

She let out a bleat like a frightened goat, that might have been audible thirty yards away if there were no other noise.

"Louder! I'll blow your brains out if you disobey!"

So she screamed at the top of her lungs, making her voice carry as all desert people can. And after she had called three times she was answered by a clear, contralto woman's voice.

"Ay—ish—a! O Ay—ish—a!"

"Jael! Jael!" she called back; and at that the rider of the middle camel waved the cloth again.

As fast as they caught sight of it—in tens and twenties—the oncoming riders halted.

But Ali Baba did not stand still. Neither did we. The three lone individuals in front of us began to approach.

"Come on!" said Grim. "Now's our chance!"

And at last I saw his idea. I did not know which to admire more, the man who had thought of it in that sudden crisis, or Ali Baba who had understood so swiftly and carried out his part so well. But there was no time for admiration then.

All together—Ali Baba and his men along one side of a right angle and we from the other—we swooped on the three. And there were nine or ten shots fired before we closed on them, though none by our side.

My camel went down under me twenty yards before we reached them. Two other camels were killed, and one of Ali Baba's sons was grazed. But in another second we had captured two men and a woman, and it was too late for the spectators to do anything unless they cared to risk killing their own leader.

I THRUST my way on foot through the milling camels, for I wanted to be in at the death, as it were, and I saw Grim take the woman's rifle away. She looked more surprized than any one I have ever seen—more so than a man I once saw shot in the stomach, who looked suddenly into the next world and did not like it.

"Shout to 'em, Jael!" he ordered in plain English. "Call 'em off, or I'll kill you! Shout to 'em; d'you hear!"

"Ayisha! What does this mean? Ali? Ali Higg? You here? I don't understand!"

"You'll be dead before you understand if you don't call those men off," Grim answered; and his pistol demonstrated that he meant it, for her men were closing in on us.

So she knelt up on her camel and cried out that Ali Higg was there, bidding them keep their distance.

"But what does this mean? Ali? And you speak English? Since when? Oh! I must be mad! You are not Ali Higg! No! I see now you are not, but——"

She turned on Ayisha and spoke in Arabic:

"Ayisha, what does this mean? Answer me!"

But Ayisha said nothing. She chose to get back between the curtains of the *shibriyah*, and I saw Narayan Singh on the far side whispering to her.

"For," as he told me afterward, "the time to persuade a woman you are her friend is when she is afraid or distracted by doubt. At all other times she is like a leopard; but then she is like a lost sheep!"

The silence was at an end now. Every one was shouting; the real Ali Higg's men wanting to know what had happened and Ali Baba's answering them with threats if

they dared disobey and come closer. The effect was exactly as if the figures on a motion-picture screen could be heard calling back and forth.

The two men whom we had captured with the woman Jael were silent, staring hard at Grim as if they saw a vision; and Yussuf, the prisoner we had made at the oasis, tried to talk to them, but they would not listen to him; the drama was too absorbing. Jael herself, inclined to be panicky at first, was recovering self-possession by rapid stages and grew silent.

She hardly looked like a woman until you came quite close to her, for she was dressed like a man in the regular Bedouin cloak and head-gear, with a bandoleer full of cartridges. But her hair had come unbound, and one long reddish lock of it was over her shoulder.

She had a good-looking, strong face, badly freckled, and was probably about forty years old, although that much was hard guessing in the moonlight; for the rest, she looked like the incarnation of activity—standing still but only by suppression.

"Now Jael Higg," said Grim, "we'll have no squeamishness about sex. I'm in a tight place, and you'll obey orders or take the consequences. We're going to Petra, the lot of us."

"*You!* Are coming with *me!* To Petra?"

"Yes. And we've escort enough. Who commands those men?"

"I!"

"Yes, yes. But who's at the head of them now?"

"Ibrahim ben Ah."

"Call out for Ibrahim ben Ah to come here to speak with Ali Higg, and watch that he comes alone," Grim ordered, and two or three of Ali Baba's men went off to obey. "Now, Jael, you do the talking. Understand me, though; this pistol has a way of going off quite suddenly when the trigger is pressed. Answer: What village were you intending to raid?"

"None."

"No use lying. Ali Higg's spy brought word to him that the British are engaged elsewhere. Raid follows promptly, of course. Now, out with it! I don't need you at Petra; Ayisha will serve my purpose there. You've ten seconds before I pull the trigger. Where was this raid headed for?"

"El-Maan."

"Why?"

"That place has become too independent. The tribes meet there and plan raids on their own account."

"Uh-huh. That sounds fairly credible. Now, observe—I pass my pistol to this Indian."

He handed it to me.

"He will shoot you dead if you make one false move. You will tell Ibrahim ben Ah to take all his men at once to that next oasis on the way to El-Maan, and to wait there for yourself and Ali Higg—to wait as long as three days if necessary. Say you will join them there and lead the raid. You understand me?"

"Yes."

"You understand that you will die immediately if you disobey?"

"Yes."

"He will ask what the shooting meant just now. You will answer that there was a mistake owing to the darkness, and that Ali Higg is in a great rage, and he had better make himself scarce. If he asks other questions, curse him and tell him to be off.

"And one last warning, Jael Higg! Obey me exactly, and you shall see your husband in Petra. Disobey by as much as a word or a sign, and you're dead. Do we understand each other?"

"You really mean it? You will go to Petra?"

"Yes."

"I have seen fools and men in love and gamblers, but you are the greatest madman of them all," she answered. "Very well, I will speak to him as you say."

Grim mounted his camel and rode to the top of a ridge of sand about twenty yards away, where he halted and sat motionless. If he really looked so much like Ali Higg, as seemed to be the case, no one at that distance could have doubted his identity. I hauled off two or three paces, so as not to betray the fact that I was to be Jael's executioner in a certain contingency, and the long sleeve of my cloak concealed the pistol.

As I am setting down the facts exactly as they happened, I may as well record here that I laughed. She thought I laughed at her in cold-blooded delight at the prospect of murder, and I think that tightened her resolution not to give me the least excuse.

But I was not feeling in the least cold-blooded. I was laughing at myself, who

might be forced to shoot a woman after all.

Perhaps Grim gave the job to me because he knew I would not shoot her in any case. I don't know. Nor do I myself know now whether I would have shot her; sometimes I think yes, sometimes no. My guess is that I would have failed to do it, and that Narayan Singh, who was standing by and heard every word that passed, would have wiped my eye, as the saying is.

Then Ibrahim ben Ah came striding into our midst, like an old-time shepherd with a modern rifle in place of crook, looking neither to the right nor the left of him but fixing his eyes on the man he thought was Ali Higg on the camel beyond us. He seemed surprized when Jael Higg stopped him, and told him to take all his men at once to that oasis, where he was to wait, if necessary, three days.

"I was told to speak with the Lion himself," he objected. "*Ya sit Jael,** there is wrath for those who disobey him!"

"Go, taste his wrath then!" she retorted. "There was shooting because of a mistake in the darkness. Good camels were killed. He is more enraged than at the loss of twenty men. He would have it the blame is yours——"

"*Mashallah!* Mine!"

"But I persuaded him. He cools his wrath in the moonlight, communing with Allah. Better go, Ibrahim, before his mood changes again."

"But how came he to be here ahead of us? We left him in Petra. How——"

"How old beards love to wag! Fool! Go ask him then! I call these men to witness, I have given the order that he told me to give to you. I wash my hands!"

She began to make the gesture of washing hands, but thought better of it, for I might have mistaken that for a signal. Old Ibrahim ben Ah looked straight into her eyes, read resolution there, and bowed like a courtier to a queen. Then he turned on his heel, strode back to his camel, mounted, and returned to his men without another word to any one. Yet I dare bet that he had counted us, and knew we were all strangers, and dare say his thoughts would fill a good long chapter of a book.

Grim continued to sit his camel motionless until the raiders under Ibrahim ben Ah had formed into four long lines and ridden away westward, towing enough baggage-animals behind them for a week or two's supplies.

"One hundred and forty men," he announced when they were gone. "The Lion of Petra can't have many left."

## CHAPTER IX

*"I think we've got the lion of Petra on the hip!"*

GRIM is one of those fellows who tell you their principles as grudgingly as they let out facts. He would make the poorest sort of propagandist or politician, for he doesn't advertise, and hates long arguments. What he knows, he knows is so because it works; and he proceeds to put it to work.

Nor is he much of a teacher. He takes people as he finds them and adapts his plans accordingly. So it is only from observation extended over a considerable period in all sorts of circumstances that I can say I believe his first and underlying principle is to look for the positive, concrete usefulness in any one with whom he is associated, whether friend or enemy. And this I have heard him say several times:

"In secret service you limit yourself if you make plans. The game is to listen and watch. Presently the other fellow always tells his plans or else betrays them."

And he is no such fool as to be caught in the act of listening, or to forewarn his enemy by seeming to wish to listen.

He gave the order to march at once. Some of the men doubled up uncomfortably on the riding-camels, because of the three that had been killed, and the Bishareen fell to me.

I ranged alongside Jael Higg, with Narayan Singh on the other side of her. At that we were off, Grim leading well in advance, with Ali Baba and six men in attendance.

The moon was a bit behind us by that time, so that I did not have much chance to observe Jael Higg narrowly until she turned her face to speak to me. But she was not long about doing that—say fifteen minutes—nine hundred seconds; suppressed curiosity can work up a pretty high pressure in that time.

"Who is this man who looks like Ali Higg?" she asked me suddenly, and I had a good look at her face; you don't have to answer questions without thinking, just because they are asked by a woman in a friendly tone of voice.

*O lady Jael.

Her nose was Roman and very narrow, and her dark eyes looked straight at you without their pupils converging, which produced a sensation of being seen through. She had splendid teeth; and her mouth, which was humorous, turning upward at the corners when she smiled, had nevertheless a certain suggestion of stealthy strength—perhaps cruelty. Her chin was firm and practical. So were her freckled hands. I decided that the less I said the better.

"He is a sheikh," said I pretty abruptly.

She turned that empty information over in her mind for a minute, and decided to turn her guns on me. Conversation was not easy, for we were swinging along at a great pace, and my camel was a lot smaller than hers.

"And you are an Indian? How is it that you speak English?"

"Many of us speak it. We pass our college examinations in English."

"How do you come to be with that—that sheikh?" she asked next.

"It pleases me to follow him. *Inshallah*, I may help him in case of sickness."

"You are a *hakim*?"

I admitted that, although secretly pitying any poor devil who might pin faith to the claim.

"Ali Higg—the real one, who is known as the Lion of Petra—believes in Indian *hakims*, like all these Arabs who have no use for European doctors. And this big man on my left, who is he?"

"My servant."

"An Afghan?"

"A Pathan."

She turned that over in her mind, too, for several minutes.

"And how does Ayisha come to be with you?" she asked at last.

At that Narayan Singh broke silence, and although he denied it afterward I know that his only motive was to get a little preliminary vengeance on Ayisha for the names she had called him. He maintains that he was "casting a stone, as it were, into a pond to see which way the ripples went."

"Few women will refuse to follow a Pathan, when honored by his admiration," he boomed.

I could not see her face then, because she was staring at Narayan Singh.

"Do you realize whose wife you are tampering with?" she asked him.

"Hah! Where I come from a man must guard his women if he hopes to keep them."

"Where you are going to, such a man as you will find his own life hard enough to keep," she retorted.

"*Bismillah!* I have kept it thus far," said Narayan Singh.

She turned to me again.

"What does the sheikh of yours call himself?"

"Hajji Jimgrim bin Yazid of El-Abdeh."

"Jimgrim? Jimgrim? Where have I heard that name?"

"The stars have heard it," roared Narayan Singh, loud enough for the stars to hear him boast. "He has taken the Lion of Petra's shape. He has taken his name. He has taken his wife. And now he will take his den. *Akbar*, Jimgrim Ali Higg of Petra!"

Mahommed the poet was riding two or three behind us in the line, and heard that. He took the cue and began his song. In a minute the whole line was roaring the refrain, and it broke like volleys on the night:

*"Akbar! Akbar! Jimgrim Ali Higg!"*

Jael Higg laughed.

"He has a fool's luck and a lusty band of followers," she said. "It was only because Ayisha called out that he caught me. But a fool's luck is like a breath of wind that passes."

Suddenly she sat bolt upright and raised her right hand.

"Oh, this night! This madness! Of all the dreams, of all the hallucinations, this is the wildest! I warned Ali Higg! I told him my foreboding, and he laughed!"

She looked down at me again, and studied me for half a minute.

"Tell me," she went on, "is that Sheikh Jimgrim of yours mad? Or am I mad?"

"If you ask my opinion as a *hakim*," I answered, "you were mad to sit your camel alone with two men within reach of our Jimgrim."

"What does he think he will do with me at Petra?"

"He thinks silently," said I.

Whereat she too was silent for a few minutes, and then broke out into a new tirade of exclamations, but this time in a language of which I knew not one word—perhaps Russian, or Slovak, or Bulgarian. I think she was praying in a sort of wild way to long-neglected saints.

She gave me the impression of being mentally almost unhinged by the sudden anticlimax of helplessness after overconfidence. Yet when she spoke again her voice was calm, and not without a ring of rather gallant humor.

"I suppose he thinks he has stolen the queen bee, and so has the swarm in his power. But the swarm can sting, and will come for the queen bee."

"So they bring their honey with them, who minds that?" Narayan Singh retorted.

He was enjoying himself, acting the part of a bandit's follower with perfect gusto.

"Oh! So it is honey you are after? And you two are Indians—a Pathan and——"

"From Lahore," said I.

"Five thousand pounds would buy your services?"

"Five thousand promises would make us laugh," said the Sikh.

"How much will your sheikh ever pay you? In an hour I will show you a *wady* down which we three can escape. Agree to that and you shall have five thousand each the same hour that we reach Petra."

"*Wallahi!* Doubtless!" laughed Narayan Singh. "Five thousand bastinados each from Ali Higg, while the queen bee laughs at us for fools! Nay, lady Jael, you are Jimgrim's prisoner."

"Jimgrim!" she said. "Jimgrim! Somewhere I have heard that name."

And she turned it over in her mind again like a taster trying wine, not speaking again for nearly an hour, until we drew abreast of a chaos of irregular great boulders that partly concealed the mouth of a gorge as dark and ugly as the throat of Tophet.

"There is your chance!" she said. "Will you take it? You shall have employment with the Lion of Petra! Come!"

But neither of us answered, and I kept a bright lookout for a pistol she still might have concealed on her; for she had not been searched—there was none who could do that with decency except Ayisha, who was not to be trusted.

I KNEW Grim would not halt again before morning because the camels would not feed properly until after daylight, even if you put corn in front of them. We were likely in for a forced march on Petra, and he would not choose to halt twice if it could be helped. And I supposed that when we did halt he would look to Narayan Singh and me for information.

Yet Mrs. Ali Higg number one was hardly a person you could expect to answer questions truthfully; and even until the stars began to grow pale in the east ahead of us I possessed my soul in patience.

Then: "Is it money your Sheikh Jimgrim wants?" she asked at last. "Does he hold me to ransom? If so, I will give him a draft on the Bank of Egypt. I have Ali Higg's seal here, and I write all his letters."

I did not answer, but Narayan Singh checked his camel a stride or two to make a signal to me behind her back.

"Hah!" he remarked with an air of triumph.

And I took that to mean that in his judgment Jimgrim could find use for Ali Higg's seal.

But of course she heard him, and she took it to mean that she had guessed rightly. She turned to Narayan Singh; and because in that land, as an almost invariable rule, no business with a chief can be accomplished without bribing his minions, she worked off a little spite and offered largesse with the same hand.

"Arrange good terms for me, and you shall have Ayisha."

"But I have her," said Narayan Singh with a great laugh.

"Maybe. But you haven't settled yet with Ali Higg. Arrange good terms for my ransom, and I will see that Ali Higg wipes off Ayisha's score."

"We shall see about that; we shall see," he answered.

"Yes, yes! You go and see! Go to him now!"

"When we halt," the Sikh answered.

"In an hour it may be too late," she insisted. "If Ali Higg is prowling and should swoop down on you, who would bargain then?"

By that time it was light enough to see clearly at close range, and Narayan Singh caught my eye behind her back. I nodded. If there were any likelihood of Ali Higg being on the prowl, why should she be in such a hurry to make terms?

Right then Grim called a halt—none too soon for the camels—in a semicircular space protected by a low cliff that might have been a quarry face two thousand years ago; what might have been a pit was all filled in by drifted sand. But he had his own mat spread on the top of the cliff, whence he

could keep an eye on the surrounding country, and gave none of the prisoners a chance to talk to him.

Nobody helped Jael Higg from her camel, for she jumped down like an acrobat and stood staring about her at Ali Baba's gang, and being stared at as they went about the business of offloading the complaining beasts. I saw Ayisha get out of the *shibriyah*, face around slowly, and meet Jael's eyes.

Neither woman spoke for a minute, or made any sign, but you could almost see the alternating current of scorn and hate that passed between them. Then Ayisha fell back on insolence and walked past Jael deliberately, with dark eyes flashing and a thin smile on her lips.

"So you are now a Pathan's light o' love?" Jael sneered in Arabic.

At that Ayisha turned again and faced her.

"Who speaks? She whom the Lion could not trust to go to Hebron? Um Kulsum!"*

Ayisha passed on with a scornful shoulder movement. Narayan Singh grinned with malicious amusement. And I was just in time to catch two of the men again attacking my medicine-chest. Instead of trying to open it they were dragging it along the ground, and they were as pleased with themselves as two small dogs caught burying a boot.

"She has given us money!"

"Who has?"

"The lady Ayisha. We are to bring her this, and she will take poison from it and put it in the other woman's food! So Jimgrim will be rid of her, and all will be well!"

I got Narayan Singh to keep his eye on the chest, and walked up to where Grim was going through the form of Moslem prayer, facing Mecca on his mat on the low hill-top. That was for the benefit of the prisoners, no doubt.

To save time I got down on my knees beside him and went through the same motions, keeping a bright lookout for interruptions and telling him in low tones all that had taken place, repeating conversations word for word as well as I could recall them.

At last we both squatted, facing each other, and he lighted a cigaret, but it was several minutes yet before he answered.

"Wants to make terms in a hurry, eh? And has the Lion's seal with her?" he said at last. "Well, as old Ali Baba keeps repeating, Allah makes all things easy! It's a little soon to talk yet, but I think we've got the Lion of Petra on the hip!"

## CHAPTER X

*"There's no room for two of you!"*

OF COURSE, no committee in the world ever yet did more than cloud an issue with argument. It takes one man to lead the way through any set of circumstances, and the only wise course for a committee is to make that man's decision unanimous and back it loyally. But men have their rights, as Grim is always the first to admit.

Ali Baba came and joined us on the cliff-top, and Narayan Singh was not long following suit. The Sikh said nothing, but Ali Baba was conscious of the weight that years should give to his opinion, as well as justly proud of his night's work, and not at all disposed to sit in silence.

"Now the right course, Jimgrim, is to make a great circuit and carry these two women back across the British border," he began at once. "The Lion of Petra will then pay us all large sums of money, without which you will refuse to intercede with the Government on his behalf for their return.

"Thus every one will be satisfied except the Lion, who will be too poor for a long time afterward to have much authority in these parts. Moreover, it will be told for a joke against him, and he will lose in prestige. I am an old man, who know all about these matters."

"What do you think, Narayan Singh?" Grim asked.

"*Sahib*, what are we but a flying column? Swiftness and surprize are our two advantages. We should be like a javelin thrown from ambush that seeks out the enemy's heart. If we fail we are but a lost javelin—an officer, a sepoy, a civilian and a handful of thieves—there are plenty more! If we succeed, there is a deed done well and cheaply! I never hunted lions; but I have seen a tiger trapped and beaten. Have we not good bait with us?"

There followed a hot argument between Arab and Sikh, each accusing the other of ulterior motives as well as ignorance and cowardice; in fact, they acted like any other

*Um Kulsum was a lady in Arabic legend whose immoralities have made her name a byword.

committee, growing less and less parliamentary as their views diverged. Ali Baba seemed to consider it relevant to call Narayan Singh a drunkard, and the Sikh considered it his duty in the circumstances to refer to Ali Baba's jail record. In the midst of all that effort to solve the problem at Petra Grim asked me to go and invite Jael Higg to join us.

In that hard, uncharitable desert daylight she did not impress me very favorably. The lines of her freckled face suggested too much ruthlessness, and though she was positively handsome in a certain way—as long as you observed the whole effect and did not study details—there was a look of cold experience about her brown eyes that chilled you. Of course, she was tired and that made a difference; but I did not find it easy to feel sympathetic, and I thought she was hardly the woman to win a jury's verdict on the strength of personal appeal.

Nevertheless, with all the odds against her, she accomplished that morning what I had never done, or seen done, although many have attempted it and failed. She contrived to tear away Grim's mask and to expose the man's real feelings.

He was always an enigma to me until that interview, at which they squatted facing each other on Grim's mat, with me beside Grim and the Sikh and Ali Baba glaring daggers at each other on either hand. The early sun seemed to edge everybody with a sort of aura, but it also showed every detail of a face and made it next to impossible to hide emotion.

SHE opened the ball. I imagine she had been doing that most of her life.

"Jimgrim?" she said. "Jimgrim? Are you by any chance the American named James Grim, who fought with Lawrence in Allenby's campaign?"

Grim astonished us all by admitting it at once. The name Jimgrim sounds enough like Arabic to pass muster; and we wondered why he should have gone to all that trouble to disguise himself, only to confess his real name when there seemed no need. Even Ali Baba left off cursing the Sikh under his breath.

"I am glad to know that," she said. "It will save my wasting words. No man could ever get your reputation without being ruthless. I won't annoy you by pleading for mercy."

And she looked at once as merciless as she expected him to be.

"Now, Jael Higg," he answered, "let's talk sense."

"You're a rare one, if you can!" she retorted.

"Let's do our best," he said kindly.

She looked very keenly at him for thirty seconds, and seemed to make up her mind that she had no chance against him.

"Very well," she said. "I'll begin by being sensible. How much money do you want?"

It is true that the more you analyze Grim's face the more he does impress you as a keen business man. But there are modifying symptoms. He did not appear to have heard the question.

"I want you to be straightforward and tell me all you know of Ali Higg's circumstances."

"Yes. I'd expect you to want that. As an American hired by the British to help them exploit this country, that's what you would ask. After you know all about him you can fix the ransom. That right? Well, I won't tell."

"I hoped we were going to talk sense," he answered quietly.

"How can any one talk sense with a man like you? What are you doing in this country? 'Horning in' is what they'd call it in America. You've got no business here.

"It's different in my case. I'm married to Ali Higg. I've thrown in my lot with these people. I've a right to help them to independence. But what right have you got to interfere? Bah! Name your price. I'll pay if I can."

"Well, Jael," he answered with a rather whimsical smile, "I'll try to disillusion you to begin with. Perhaps if you understand me better you'll be reasonable.

"All I know is Arabic and Arabs. I've no other gifts, and I like to be some use in the world. I'm real fond of Arabs. It 'ud tickle me to see them make good. But I can see as far through a stone wall as any blind horse can, and I know—better maybe than you do, Jael—that all they'll get by cutting loose and playing pirates is the worst end of it. I hate to see them lose out, so I use what gifts I've got in their behalf."

"Do you call it helping us to come out against Ali Higg and kidnap his wives?" she retorted. "Ali Higg is a patriot. He's

against all foreign control of Arab country, and he's man enough to fight.

"These British and French and Italians promised us an independent Arab country. Where is it? Have you seen any of it? No! And you're helping the British break their promise!

"Ali Higg is doing his best to redeem what Arabs fought for in the war, and I'm his wife. You ask me to betray him? Never!"

"Ali Higg is doing his worst, not his best, Jael."

"He is creating unity among these tribes," she retorted.

"He is practically forcing the British to come out and smash him," said Grim. "Now, see here, Jael; I don't want him smashed. I don't hold with his method, but that's the Arab's business; if being crucified and shot for differences of opinion suits them, why, no doubt Ali Higg's the right man for them. They tell me he delivers the goods. But he can't go starting a new war out here; not while I've any say, he can't."

"Who are you that should say or not say?" she demanded.

"Same as Ali Higg, Jael; I'm a human. He's from Arabia, you're from the Balkans, I'm from the U. S. We're all three foreigners, aren't we?"

"Yes. But he and I are foreigners who will drive the British out——"

"And let French or Italians in."

"Ali Higg is a fighter, I tell you! He's an Arab, and he knows how to control Arabs just as the Prophet Mohammed did. He has only begun in a small way, but——"

"But he'll wind up like a small-town sport in the lock-up, the way he's going," said Grim. "Now, see here, Jael; I'm just as set on doing my bit in the world as Ali Higg is. Maybe I'm a mite more tolerant, but there isn't a man or woman living who can shift me off a course, once I'm set on it.

"Ali Higg considers the Arabs need a holy war. I'm —— bent for peace. I'm going to stop him. I'm not arguing that point, for it won't bear arguing, and I'm not trying to convert you. But you're in my power, and though I sure would hate to inconvenience a lady, I'm that plumb remorseless I'd separate you from Ali Higg forever unless you helped me call him off the warpath."

"Help you?" she exclaimed with horror.

"Sure. You've got to! There's no law this side of the border, Jael, that can make me hand you over to authority. There's no mandate out here yet. There never will be one if I can prevent it.

"I'm here to keep a foreign army from trespassing across the Jordan, it being my crazy notion that Arabs can evolve their own government, if let. You've got to help me keep that foreign army out, or take the consequences."

She laughed at last. It was rather a hard laugh without much mirth in it.

"Your words are a liar's, but your voice rings true," she said. "I think you're only another of these diplomatists."

"I'm that diplomatic I'm chancing my hide to save other peoples'," he answered. "Let's be quite frank, Jael. I'm in danger out here. All I've got with me besides two respectable men are thieves from El-Kalil. That little army of Ali Higg's lies between me and the border, and I'm no kind of a darn-fool optimist when it comes to figuring on Ali Higg's hospitality in Petra, Nor am I kidding myself I can persuade his dibs by a theological argument or any cheap advice.

"But I've reasoned it out this way—if Ali Higg sends Ayisha to El-Kalil rather than trust you to do your shopping, that's because he sets a value on you. Since he sends you out in charge of a raid on El-Maan I guess he sets a high value on you. That's as good as saying you've got influence. Believe me, Jael, you'll use that influence to suit my plans or we're not going to be friends!"

"Friends?" she said, and stared at him.

"Sure. Why not? Look at the men I've got with me; they're all my friends. I'm right proud to say it. I might have hanged most of them once, but I never knew it do much good to a man to hang him; so we got acquainted, and one way and another we contrive to keep on good terms.

"See my point? Nobody'd hang you if I scooted back over the border with you, Jael. There isn't a law that would cover your case. But they'd deport you, and you'd be an outcast with tabs kept on you, and I've seen your sort come to a bad end. I never liked to see it. I never saw anybody gain by it. I'd sooner see you winning every one's respect by sticking to Ali Higg and schooling him to play safe."

Her pale face actually blushed under the freckles. She had not lived in America for

nothing. As the wife of a polygamist she knew exactly what he meant about winning respect. Her sort enjoys to be patronized by reformers and social uplifters about as much as an eagle likes a cage.

"You talk well," she said, "but you must be a fool at bottom, or you wouldn't suggest friendship with me. Can you imagine me not pushing you into Ali Higg's clutches at the first chance?"

"Sure I can, or I wouldn't waste time talking. You've got more sense than that, Jael. You might trick me. It has been done.

"Ali Higg might scupper me and the crowd—he mighty likely would. But that 'ud be the end of Ali Higg's prospects, for as sure as my name's Grim the British would smash him to avenge me, and you know it! If they didn't get you they'd get him, and you'd become the property of the first petty chief who could lay his hands on you. So let's talk like two sensible people."

"You'll find me sensible," she answered. "I shall just do nothing—tell you nothing."

"You've told too much already to be able to stop now, Jael," he answered, smiling. "I'm sure you won't put me to the necessity of searching you; you've too much pride for that. So suppose you pass me Ali Higg's seal—the one you sign all his letters with. No, don't try to hide it in the sand; put it here."

HE HELD his hand out, and she bit her lip in mortification. It was too bad that she had made that slip of boasting to Narayan Singh and me about the seal, but there was nothing else for it now and she gave it to him—a gold thing as big as a silver half-dollar, marvelously engraved.

"That settles the financial end of it," said Grim. "We can impound all that money in the Bank of Egypt—although I'm free to admit I wouldn't take such a seal away from a friend of mine."

"Give it back then," she answered with a bitter little laugh. "I see I'll have to be your friend."

He smiled—wonderfully gently. There wasn't the least offense in it, although there wasn't any credulity either.

"I always aim to prove myself a man's friend—or a woman's," he said, "before expecting to be trusted out of sight. I daresay that's your code too?"

"If ever Ali Higg catches you with that seal——"

"He won't catch me, Jael; he won't catch me. But you shall have it back, and the money shan't be touched, if you play straight."

She shrugged her shoulders petulantly, admitting defeat but resenting it. There came a time, months later, when she understood Grim's peculiar altruism and respected it, but she was a long way just then from admiring him.

"You force me," she said. "Name your terms."

"Well then, suppose we speak of Ali Higg to begin with. Is his temper uneven? Is there any way to catch him in a specially good humor?"

"He's the most even-tempered man I know," she laughed. "He's always in a rage."

"So much the easier for us," Grim answered. "That kind always make mistakes. He must have counted on your brains exclusively to keep him on top; and now your brains are in my pocket, so to speak. How's his health? Boils? Indigestion?"

She nodded.

"Ah! Most angry men have indigestion. Dislikes European doctors, I dare say? Thought so; most fanatical Moslems do that. But an Indian *hakim?* Now many an Indian *hakim* knows how to relieve indigestion—in between the bouts of rage. D'you suppose he'd entertain a *hakim?*"

She nodded again.

"Well, we'll fix it so a *hakim* can relieve his boils and indigestion. But let you and me understand each other first, Jael. I can be a mean man when I must, but I'll always take a heap of trouble to find a white man's way of accomplishing the same purpose. I can act mean toward you—sheer plug-ugly if you force my hand—but I'd sooner not; and I'd just as lief help you as hinder you, provided you don't upset what I'm seeking to build."

She laughed again, and not so bitterly.

"You're on the wrong side of the wall to build much," she answered. "You should come over into our camp. You're so like Ali Higg in certain lights and in some of your gestures, and so unlike him in other things, that if you came across the Jordan for good I think you could show us something."

Her eyes said far more than her lips did. She was studying him from a new angle—

a thoughtful, speculative angle that vaguely excited her.

"What I mean is just this," he said; "that you and I had better decide to be real friends, and not half-open enemies, each looking for a chance to spoil the other's game. There are men in this camp who'll tell you that I keep my word. I'm willing to pledge it not to hurt you or Ali Higg, provided you pledge yours to be equally friendly and to help me in taming Ali Higg so's he'll be useful and not just an ordinary trouble-maker."

"Would you accept my word?" she asked him—ready to consider him fool or liar, according to how he answered.

"I'll accept it, Jael. Sure. For you'll have to give it, and it's all you've got to trade with. And I'll watch you just about twice as carefully as examiners watch the bank directors of New York State.

"Knowing you're watched, like them you're going to be too proud to cheat; and after you've found how it pays to play straight with me, you're going almost to enjoy being watched for the sake of the advertisement."

Her face did not soften in the least; but it changed expression, like a woman buyer's, who has decided to make a purchase but has not done bargaining.

"I think I'm going to like you," she said. "Of course, you're a liar like all men, but you've a finer touch than most."

At that point Ali Baba made his first contribution to the argument. The old man did not know much English, but there are certain words—such as liar, cheat, swine, thief, and the list of oaths—that find their way like water to the common level and are known from Spitzbergen to the Horn.

"He is no liar!" he exclaimed in Arabic. "A cunning man with the brain of three, who can use the truth for his own ends! A keeper of secrets! An upsetter of plans! But he is no liar, and I will not hear him called one by a woman! Peace, thou fool! It is written that a woman's tongue is worse than water dripping through a roof!"

It is manners in that country to sit silent while an old man speaks, and even Jael Higg did not offer to rebuke him for the interruption. When he had quite finished, Grim took up the argument again.

"Now let's know where we stand. Are you and I to be friends, Jael?"

She nodded.

"I'm no half-way adventurer. I'll make your fortune," she said, "if you'll come the whole way with me, and stay this side of Jordan."

He shook his head and smiled back at her.

"You've your work cut out to keep Ali Higg off the rocks, Jael."

"There's no room for two of you," she answered darkly.

"I guess not."

She looked hard at me, and back from me to Grim. I don't know yet whether she was setting a trap for us or really in earnest about what she said next. Grim thinks she was drawing a bow at a venture.

"Is this the *hakim?* One of the two respectable persons you have with you? Hm! Respectability is a mask—often a safe mask, often an offensive one, always a lie. All really dangerous criminals are respectable people.

"And a *hakim,* eh? An Indian physician? I have heard of Indian physicians being poisoners—although, of course, they're respectable people and give the poison by mistake! Now, if he should go to Ali Higg and poison him, while pretending to cure boils and indigestion——"

"But he won't," said Grim, "so why suppose?"

"Of course he won't unless you tell him to!" she snapped. "I dare say he's as much in your power as I am. But suppose you tell him to——"

"I won't, Jael."

"Now don't you be a fool, James Grim! You can't deceive me into thinking you're above such things. That haughty attitude is British, not American; you've been defiled by contact with them. Come out in the open like an unhypocritical American. Talk business.

"I've tried to make a man of Ali Higg, but he's only an animal after all. The best I can ever do with him will be failure compared to what I could make of you, James Grim. You look enough like him to make it possible to substitute you with care. Go ahead and send your *hakim.*"

Grim smiled with perfect good humor, but a blind man could not have mistaken his refusal.

"Oh, you're all hypocrites, you men—Americans, English, French—you're all alike; glad to see a man die, if he's a nuisance, but afraid to admit you'd a hand in it. But you needn't fear. You can send

your *hakim* uninstructed. He's an Indian, isn't he? Well, Ali Higg is sure to insult him to the very marrow of his bones, and you can safely leave Indian revengefulness to do the rest."

Grim shook his head.

"He'd be too afraid he might meet me some day. He knows I'd not stand for it. No, Jael; I invited you to talk sense. You've got to make shift with Ali Higg 'as is.' If you don't like it, say so now and I'll tell off three or four of my thieves to escort you over the border into British territory while I play this game without you.

"What you've got to understand first and last is that I'm dead set on clipping Ali Higg's claws. I don't care a row of imitation pewter shucks about any man's ambition, or any woman's past. My job in the world is to do what I'm able to do, and I'm going to prevent war in this land if I get killed doing it and have to ruin you in the bargain! Now, are we set?"

"I think you're a fool," she said, "and you think me a villain. We're strange partners! Very well, let's try."

Promptly he handed her an envelope, sheet of paper, and his fountain pen.

"Write first, then, to Ibrahim ben Ah. He knows your hand, I suppose? Tell him there is news of a British force coming over the border, and that he must stay at that oasis in readiness to attack after Ali Higg has taken steps to draw the British in the right direction.

"Say he may have to stay there a week or ten days, and that he is to enforce the death penalty on any of his men who dares try to leave the oasis. Tell him that secrecy as to his present whereabouts is the all-important point. For that reason strangers may be made prisoner and held until further orders. The messenger who bears this is to be sent back with an answer immediately."

"How much of that is true about a British force?" she demanded. "Are you trying to trap those men?"

"None of it's true. No, they're safe. You write, and I'll sign it with your seal."

She hesitated, but I don't know whether from caution or from a genuine dislike to deceive her husband's loyal henchman. But there was no way of getting out of it except by blunt refusal, involving the threatened escort into British territory and deportation. So she wrote, and Grim sealed the letter. He handed it to Ali Baba.

"Select the most trustworthy of your sons, O King of Thieves, give him the fastest camel, and let him ride with that to the oasis. Bid him ride hard and overtake us with the answer."

"Do you think my sons have wings?" asked Ali Baba.

"Not unless devils are winged!" laughed Grim. "It is a simple matter—just there and back again."

"Not so simple, Jimgrim! It is written that in the desert all men are enemies. What if he should meet a dozen men?"

"The letter will be his pass. He must take a chance returning."

"*Wallahi!* A letter? A pass into *Jehannum* possibly! By ——, Jimgrim, a man needs more than a letter in these parts. He needs brains—age—influence—experience.

"Nay! If any is to take that letter, let me do it. I am old, and they hesitate to kill an old man. I am wise in the desert ways, not rash. And if they do kill me, then it is only an old man's body bloating in the sun.

"Besides, I am cunning and can give wise answers, whereas those sons of mine might take offense at an insult, or recognize a blood-enemy at the wrong moment. Nay, it is I who must take that letter."

GRIM clapped him on the back.

"Good, my father; you shall go. Take one son with you to look after your comforts."

He turned that suggestion over in his mind for several minutes, but shook his head finally.

"I go alone. They would ask me why two men bring one letter. Moreover, they might send the one back with an answer, retaining the other as hostage; for it is the way of the devil to put suspicion in men's minds. Two men would double their doubt, just as two stones weigh the twice of one. And I will not take the best camel, but the worst one."

"Why?"

"Write me a second letter. Have the woman write it, and you affix the seal. Give order that they are to provide a swift, fresh camel in exchange for my weary beast. I shall make a great fuss about the beast they provide, rejecting this and that one, thus causing them to believe in me, since men without proper authority do not

act thus but are content with anything so be they can only escape unharmed."

So the second letter was written; and in the rising, scorching heat old Ali Baba set off, mounted on the meanest of the baggage beasts, whose hump was getting galled, so that he wasn't likely to be of much use to us within a day or so.

Then we all got under the shelter of the low tents to give the other camels a rest and wait for evening, and I think Jael Higg slept, but I don't know, for we gave her a tent to herself; she refused point blank to share one with Ayisha.

And Ayisha, I know, did not sleep. She came in the noon glare to the tent I occupied with Narayan Singh and entered without ceremony, slipping through the low opening with the silent ease that comes naturally to the Badawi. She squatted down in front of us, and I awoke the Sikh, who was snoring a chorus from Wagner's "Niebelungen Ring."

For a moment I thought he was going to resume the night's flirtation, but there was something in the quiet of her manner and the serious expression of her face that he recognized as quickly as I did. All her imperious attitude was gone. She did not look exactly pleading, nor yet cunning; perhaps it was a blend of both that gave her the soft charm she had come deliberately armed with.

Of this one thing I am absolutely sure; whatever that young woman did was calculated and deliberate; and the more she seemed to act on impulse, the more she had really studied out her move.

Narayan Singh checked a word halfway, and we waited for her to speak first. Her eyes sought mine, and then the medicine-chest. Then she looked back at me, and I made a gesture inviting her to speak.

"You told me," she said at last, "that you have poison in that box that would reach down to hell and slay the ifrits. Give me some of it."

"*Ya sit Ayisha*, I need it all for the ifrits," I answered.

"I will make no trouble for you," she said; and for a moment I suspected she meant to kill herself.

"You are young and beautiful," I told her. "The world holds plenty of good for you yet."

At that she flashed her white teeth and her eyes blazed.

"Truly! Allah puts a good omen into your mouth, *miyan!** Yet little comes to the woman who neglects to plan for it. Give me the poison. I will pay."

I was about to refuse abruptly, being rather old-maidish about some things and not always ready with a smile for what I don't approve; but Narayan Singh interrupted in time to prevent the unforgivable offense of preaching my own code of morals uninvited.

"Tell us who is to be poisoned," he demanded.

"That is not your business," she answered calmly.

"But the poison is our business," said the Sikh. "We make terms. If the person to be poisoned is an enemy of ours, well and good; you shall have it and we shall be gainers. But Allah forbid that we should hasten the death of a friend! Is it for Jael Higg?"

"No, for I see that to poison her would be to incur the enmity of Jimgrim. Already he takes counsel with her; did he and she not lay their heads together in your presence after morning prayers?"

"For whom then? For Jimgrim?"

"God forbid! Shall I woo a dead man? Nay! You say you will give me the poison if I tell? You swear it? Then it is for the Lion of Petra. Thus I shall win the love of Jimgrim. And Jael, being without a man, will run away to Egypt where her money is."

"*Bismillah!*" swore the Sikh. "I see no reason why I should not get an angry husband out of the way so simply! But remember, Ayisha! You must slay me in turn if you hope to have Jimgrim for husband. By my beard and the Prophet's feet,† it is I who will have you to wife, if I have to burn kingdoms first!"

"Give me the poison first, and we shall see," she laughed.

"Very well; leave us a while, Ayisha. I will persuade this master of mine, who has a vein of caution, since he lacks the zeal of love. I will bring you the stuff when he and I have talked it over."

"Strong, strong stuff," she insisted. "Stuff that would eat iron. Ali Higg's belly is tough."

"It shall come out through his flesh like flame," the Sikh promised.

As soon as she had gone, and he had

**Miyan:* the rather contemptuous form of address that Arabs use toward Indian Moslems.

†A scandalous piece of blasphemy.

watched her out of earshot, he turned to me with a gruff laugh.

"Now, *sahib*, make her up a potion of some harmless powder for me to carry to her tent while you go and tell our Jimgrim what has passed. Give her physic that will purge the Lion of Petra without doing worse than make his belly burn. Stay; give croton in a bottle; that is best."

## CHAPTER XI

*"That we make a profit from this venture!"*

LATE that afternoon before they loaded up the camels there was another conference between Grim, Jael Higg, Narayan Singh, our prisoner Yussuf, and myself. The ancient hills of Edom were not far away, and we were near enough to Petra to feel nervous. Jael made a pretty good pretense at meeting Grim half-way, and I think she had made up her mind to let him dig his own pit and tumble into it.

Yussuf was aware by that time, if not of Grim's identity, at any rate of the fact that he was an officer in the British pay, and was rather obviously considering which would likely pay him best—to side secretly with Ali Higg or openly with Grim, or both.

Having fought over all that country under Lawrence, and knowing consequently every yard of it, I suppose Grim felt neither thrilled nor mystified; but in case any scientist reads this and wants to know how I felt, "fed up and far from home" about describes it. But there was worse to come!

Grim turned to me at last, and smiled in that darned genial way he has when he means to call on your uttermost patience or endurance.

"You see, the difficulty is," he said, "to get to Ali Higg without his getting us first. He has probably got between forty and fifty men in Petra with him, so we daren't invade the place. Yet we've got to hurry, because old Ibrahim ben Ah with that army may get suspicious and send back a messenger on his own account. Now, do you feel willing to beard the Lion in his den?"

"Alone?" I asked.

I never felt less willing to do anything, and dare say my face betrayed it.

"No. Narayan Singh will go too, and of course Ayisha."

Ayisha seemed about as safe an ambassador to send as an electric spark to a barrel of powder. I glanced at Narayan Singh and felt ashamed, for his eyes glowed unmistakably. He was enthusiastic.

Well, it seems I draw a color-line after all. I can't fight like a Sikh, or be as good a man in lots of ways; but I'm not going to be outdone by one in daring, while the Sikh is looking.

"All right," I said, "I'll do anything you say."

But I did not have the perfect voice-control I would have liked, and Jael Higg grinned. That naturally settled it.

"Narayan Singh needn't come, if he'd rather stay with you," I added, and the Sikh raised his eyebrows.

"Do you dare make love to Ayisha, *sahib?*" he grinned.

I began to see the general drift of the plan of campaign, and wondered. Having seen more than a little of the Near East, and knowing how the peace of the whole world depends on preserving that unmelted hot-pot of nations from anarchy, I was not impressed by the stability of things in general!

Grim had come out on this hair-raising venture because no army was available to deal with Ali Higg, and he would not have ventured unless powers-that-pretend-to-be were sure that Ali Higg was deadly dangerous. Did the peace of the world, then, depend on the success or otherwise of a Sikh's mock love-making? It did look like it.

Narayan Singh got to his feet with a laugh and a yawn, and went to dance attendance on Ayisha, while Grim reinstructed Yussuf regarding the ease with which the British could impound his Jaffa property; but though I listened to all that, and heard Yussuf's vows of fidelity—heard him promise to reverse his former report and spread rumors in Ali's camp of a British army getting ready to advance—the prospect to me looked gloomier and gloomier.

"You can only die once," Grim laughed after a quick glance at my face, "and we may save a hundred thousand people from the sword."

But I suppose I wasn't cut out to be a willing martyr. It was a case of making a silk purse out of a sow's ear, and though I did go forward on that mad escapade it was fear that drove me—fear of the Sikh's and Grim's contempt, and of my own self-loathing afterward.

Grim and Narayan Singh are made of the

real hero stuff. I wonder how many others there are like me, who face the music simply because one or two others have guts enough to lead us up to it.

We didn't move far that night, for there was no need, and Grim was careful not to go where Ali Baba could not find him. We passed through acres of oleander-scrub into a valley twelve miles wide at its mouth, that narrowed gradually until the high red sandstone cliffs shut out the moonlight. It was like the mouth of ——, and suffocating, for the cliff-sides were giving off the heat they had sucked up through the day.

The surest sign that Ali Higg was either overconfident or seriously engaged elsewhere was that there was no guard in the ravine. Ten men properly placed could have destroyed us. Even the great Alexander of Macedon could not force that gorge and suffered one of his worst defeats there. The Turks made the same mistake and tried to oust Lawrence in the Great War, but he simply overwhelmed them with a scratch brigade of partly armed Bedouins and women.

Grim called a halt at last where a dozen caves a hundred feet above the bottom of the gorge could be reached by a goat-track leading to a ledge. There was a rift in the side wall there, making a pitch-dark corner where the camels could lie unseen and grumble to one another—safe enough until daylight, unless they should see ghosts and try to stampede for the open. Grim sent the women and Ayisha's four men up to the caves with only Narayan Singh to watch them, for there was no way of escape except by that twelve-inch goat-track.

Then, because Ali Baba's sons and grandsons were nervous about "the old man their father," and because the one thing that more than all other circumstances combined could ruin our slim chance would be panic, Grim squatted on the sand in the gorge with the men all around him and began to tell stories.

Right there in the very jaws of death, within a mile of the lair of Ali Higg, in possession of two of the tyrant's wives, with an army at our rear that might at that minute be following old Ali Baba into the gorge to cut off our one possible retreat, he told them the old tales that Arabs love, and soothed them as if they were children.

That was the finest glimpse of Grim's real manhood I had experienced yet; although I could not see him for the darkness. You couldn't see any one. It was a voice in the night—strong, reassuring—telling to born thieves stories of the warm humanity of other thieves, whose accomplishments in the way of cool cheek and lawless altruism were hardly more outrageous than the task in front of us.

And he told them so well that even when a chill draft crept along the bottom of the gorge two hours before dawn, taking the place of the hot air that had ascended, and you could feel the shiver that shook the circle of listeners, they only drew closer and leaned forward more intently—almost as if he were a fire at which they warmed themselves.

But Heavens! It seemed madness, nevertheless. We had no more pickets out than the enemy had. We were relying utterly on Grim's information that he had extracted from the women and the prisoners, and on his judgment based on that.

No doubt he knew a lot that he had not told us, for that is his infernal way of doing business; but neither that probability, nor his tales that so suited the Arab mind, nor the recollection of earlier predicaments in which his *flair* for solutions had been infallibly right, soothed my nerves much; and I nearly jumped out of my skin when a series of grunts and stumbling footfalls broke the stillness of the gorge behind us.

It sounded like ten weary camels being cursed by ten angry men, and I supposed at once that Ibrahim ben Ah had sent a detachment to investigate and that this was their advance-guard. Who else would dare lift his voice in that way in the gorge? You could hear the words presently:

"Ill-bred Somali —— beast! Born among vermin in a black man's kraal! Allah give thee to the crows! Weary? What of it? What of my back, thou awkward earthquake! Thou plow-beast! A devil sit on thee! A devil drive thee! A devil eat thee!"

*Whack! Whack!*

"Oh my bones! My old bones!"

MUJRIM was the first to recognize the voice. He got up quietly and stood in the gorge; and in another minute a blot of denser blackness that was a camel loomed above him, and he raised his hand to seize the head-rope. But the camel saw him first, and, realizing that the

journey was over at last, flung itself to the ground with the abandon of a foundered dog, and lay with its neck stretched out straight and legs all straddled anyhow. Mujrim was just in time to catch his father, who was nearly as tired as the camel. It was pretty obvious at once that Jael's authority had failed badly when it came to exchanging camels.

The sons all surrounded the old man and made a fuss over him, laying him down on a sheepskin coat and chafing his stiff muscles, calling him brave names, rubbing his feet, patting his hands, praising him; while he swore at them each time they touched a sore spot.

They would not even give him a chance to hand over his letter to Grim, until at last he swore so savagely that Mujrim paid attention and took the letter out of the old man's waist-cloth. It was in the same envelope in which the other had gone, unsealed, but with the thumb-mark of Ibrahim ben Ah imprinted on the face.

"To think that I, of all people, should fetch and carry for such dogs!" swore Ali Baba. "I asked for a good beast in exchange for mine, and they gave me this crow's meat, and laughed! May Allah change their faces! May the water of that oasis turn their bowels into stone!

"Aye, Jimgrim, they will stay there! They are glad enough to stay there. They are dogs that fear their master's whip. They are so afraid of him that I think if Ali Higg should bid them roast themselves alive the dogs would do it. May they roast a second time in —— for giving me that camel.

"Bah! What kind of sons have I? Are these the sons of my loins that let me parch? Is there no water-bag?"

Grim struck a match in the dark corner where the camels were; but all the envelope contained was a piece of jagged paper torn from the original letter, with Ibrahim ben Ah's thumb-mark done in ink made from gunpowder by way of acknowledgment. It meant presumably that instructions would be obeyed, and so far, good; we were not now in danger of trouble from that source.

But Ali Baba found his tongue again, and freed himself from his sons after he had drunk about a quart of water.

"That Ibrahim ben Ah was puzzled," he said. "Allah! But the fool asked questions; and by the Prophet's beard I lied in answer to him! Ho! What a string of lies! Who was I but a sheikh from El-Kalil bringing word to Ali Higg of the movements of a British force! In what way did I become the friend of Ali Higg? Was I not always his friend! Was it not I who fed him when he first escaped from Egypt! Ho-ho-ho! Have I not been working for a year to gather men for him in El-Kalil! Have I not made purchases in El-Kalil and El-Kudz for his wife Ayisha! *Il hamdul-illah!* my tongue was ready! May the lies rot the belly of the fool who ate them!

"But that was not all. He wanted to know other things—as for instance, whether the other force of forty men is still at large, and if so who shall protect the women in Petra?

" 'For,' quoth he, 'by Allah there are men in the neighborhood who have felt our Ali's heel, and who would not scruple to wreak vengeance if his back were altogether turned. Convey him my respectful homage, and bid him look to his rear,' said Ibrahim ben Ah."

At that Grim called to Narayan Singh, who came down the goat-track like a landslide. You mustn't whistle your man in those parts, or the Arabs will say the devil has defiled your mouth.

"Ask Jael Higg to come here."

"A word first, Jimgrim *sahib!* While I watched, those women talked. Jael, the older one, offered Ayisha forgiveness if she would obey henceforth; but Ayisha gave her only hard words, saying that in a day or so it will be seen whose cock crows loudest. So Jael called to two of the men who have been with Ayisha all this time, and they squatted in the mouth of her cave. As it was very dark I crept quite close and listened. She bade them watch their chance and run to Ali Higg.

" 'If he is ill and angry, never mind,' she said. 'If he beats you, never mind. He will reward you afterward. Bid him, as he values life,' she said, 'call in those forty men whom he would send to punish the Beni Aroun people. Tell him I am a prisoner, but that those forty are enough to turn the tables until Ibrahim ben Ah can come. A camel must leave in a hurry for Ibrahim ben Ah at the oasis, and bring him and all the men back to straighten this affair.'

"She promised them money and promotion for success, and sure death for failure!"

"Good!" said Grim, turning to me

"You see? It always pays to stage a close-up in a game like this. We've caught our friend Ali Higg between soup and fish!"

"Get in quick, then, and kidnap him," I urged.

"Man alive," he answered, "we've no kind of right to do that. Bring her down," he told Narayan Singh, "and then have Mujrim tie those four men of Ayisha's so they've no chance to escape."

Jael Higg came down in a livid passion—altogether too near home to enjoy taking second-hand orders from an Indian in the dark. She was still less amused when she discovered that Grim knew her little scheme.

"Well, Jael," he said, "you weren't quite frank with me after all, were you? Which will you do now—stay in that hole up there with a double guard, or come into Petra with us and behave yourself?"

For, I should say, a whole minute she did not answer. You could not tell in the dark, but I think she was fighting back tears, and too proud to betray it.

"I'm your prisoner," she hissed at last. "Do what you like, and take the consequences."

"I'll put you to no indignity, Jael, if you'll play fair."

"My ——! What—? Are you mad, or am I? What are you going to do with Ali Higg?"

"Make friends with him."

"You swear that?"

"Sure."

She was silent for another minute.

"Very well," she said at last. "I'll do my best."

"Accepted," answered Grim. "Now—bring down Ayisha—fetch out the camels—mount—and forward all!"

We went forward just as dawn was breaking, and I believe every man Jack of us except Grim had his heart in his teeth. Grim was likely too busy conning over his plan in his head to feel afraid, that being, as far as I could ever tell, the one lone advantage of being leader; just as the capacity to drive out fear by steady thinking is as good a reason as exists for placing a man in command.

Nobody knows how old Petra is, but it was a thriving city when Abraham left Ur of the Chaldees, and for a full five thousand years it has had but that one entrance, through a gorge that narrows finally until only one loaded camel at a time can pass. Army after army down the centuries has tried to storm the place, and failed, so that even the invincible Alexander and the Romans had to fall back on the arts of friendship to obtain the key. We, the last invaders, came as friends, if only Grim could persuade the tyrant to believe it.

THE sun rose over the city just as we reached the narrowest part of the gut, Grim leading, and its first rays showed that we were using the bed of a watercourse for a road. Exactly in front of us, glimpsed through a twelve-foot gap between cliffs six hundred feet high, was a sight worth going twice that distance, running twice that risk to see—a rose-red temple front, carved out of the solid valley wall and glistening in the opalescent hues of morning.

Not even Burkhardt, who was the first civilized man to see the place in a thousand years, described that temple properly; because you can't. It is huge—majestic—silent—empty—aglow with all the prism colors in the morning sun. And it seems to think.

It takes you so by surprize when you first see it, that in face of that embodied mystery of ancient days your brain won't work, and you want to sit spell-bound. But Grim had done our thinking for us, so that we were not the only ones surprized.

Such was the confidence of safety that those huge walls and the narrow entrance to the place inspire that Ali Higg had set only four men to keep the gate; and they slept with their weapons beside them, never believing that strangers would dare essay that ghost-haunted ravine by night.

They were pounced on and tied almost before their eyes were open; and, catching sight of Jael Higg first, and getting only a glimpse of Grim, they rather naturally thought their chief had caught them napping; so they neither cried out nor made any attempt to defend themselves; and presently, when they discovered their mistake, the fear of being crucified for having slept on duty kept them dumb.

Grim led the way straight to that amazing temple, and we invaded it camels and all, off-loading the camels inside in a hurry and then driving them out again to lie down in the wide porch between the columns and the temple wall. The porch was so

vast that even all our string of camels did not crowd it.

The main part of the interior was a perfect cube of forty feet, all hand-hewn from the cliff, and there were numerous rooms leading out of it that had once been occupied by the priests of Isis, but "the lion and the lizard" had lived in them since their day. We put the prisoners, including Ayisha's four men, in one room under guard.

That much was hardly accomplished when the spirit of our seventeen thieves reacted to their surroundings, and all the advantage of our secret arrival was suddenly undone. Half of them had gone outside to tie the camels under Ali Baba's watchful eye; and it was he, as a matter of fact, who started it. From inside we heard a regular din of battle commencing—loud shouts and irregular rifle-fire—and I followed Grim out in a hurry.

There was no enemy in sight. Old Ali Baba was busy reloading his rifle fifty paces away in front of the temple door, facing us with his sons in a semicircle around him, and they were shooting at something over our heads. Grim laughed rather bitterly.

"My mistake," he said. "I ought to have thought of that."

So I went out to see.

Surmounting the temple front, at least a hundred feet above the pavement and perfectly inaccessible, was a beautifully carved stone urn surmounting a battered image of some god or goddess. It was in shadow, because the cliff wall, from which the temple had been carved, overhung it; so it was peculiarly difficult to hit, even at that range; but they were firing away at it as if Ali Higg and all his men were hidden behind the thing. There was no particular need to stop them, for they had made noise enough already to awake the very slumbering bones of Petra. Ali Baba advised me to shoot too, and I asked him why.

"To burst the thing."

"But why?"

"That we make a profit from this venture."

"How?"

He paused to reload once more. He had already fired away about fifteen cartridges.

"Allah! The very dogs of El-Kalil have heard of Pharaoh's treasure."

"I am neither a dog," said I, "nor an inhabitant of El-Kalil, for which Allah for his thoughtfulness be praised! Tell me what you and the dogs know."

"This place was the treasury of Pharaoh, King of Egypt, a bad king and an unbeliever, whom may Allah curse! In that urn are his gold and rubies. If we can crack it they will come tumbling down and we shall all be rich."

"*Mashallah!* You believe that? Why haven't Ali Higg and his men cracked it then?"

"*Shu halalk?**  I have told you Pharaoh was an evil king. He was in league with devils and bewitched the place. The devils guard it. May Allah twist their tails! Look—see! We shoot, but the bullets miss the mark each time!"

"Perhaps you haven't prayed enough to exorcise the devils?" I suggested, and he dropped the butt of his rifle to the ground to consider the proposition.

"Out of the mouth of an unbeliever has come wisdom before now," he said. "There may be truth in that."

And he called all his sons and grandsons there and then to spread their mats and pray toward Mecca, performing the prescribed ablutions first with water from one of the goatskin bags.

Well, there wasn't any further use in trying to keep our movements secret. Grim beckoned me to where he stood beside Narayan Singh, with Ayisha looking mischievous in the gloom behind them, and issued final instructions.

"Present my compliments and these gifts to Ali Higg—I'm busy at prayer, remember—and say how greatly honored we feel to have escorted his wife across the desert. If he asks where her four men are, tell him I'll bring them later. Be sure and make me out a great Sheikh, and say I heard he is sick, so sent my *hakim* in advance to give him relief; then do your best for him, if he'll let you—*after* Ayisha has done her worst," he added in a whisper. "Don't forget you're a *darwaish*. The more you jaw religion the better the old rascal will like you. See you soon. So long!"

So Narayan Singh and I, followed by Ayisha and two of Ali Baba's sons, left that ancient temple bearing the medicine-chest as well as presents, and I hope the others did not feel as scared as I did.

*What chatter is this?

## CHAPTER XII

*"Yet I forgot to speak of the twenty aeroplanes!"*

YOU can expect anything, of course, of Arabs. People who will pitch black cotton tents in the scorching sun, and live in them in preference to gorgeous cool stone temples because of the devils and ghosts that they believe to haunt those habitable splendors, will believe anything at all except the truth, and act in any way except reasonably. So I tried to believe it was all right to be unreasonable too.

You would think, wouldn't you, that a man who had set himself up to be the holy terror of a countryside, and put his heel on the necks of all the tribes for miles around, would have made use at least of the caves and tombs to strengthen his position. There were thousands of them all among those opal-colored cliffs, to say nothing of ruined buildings; yet not one was occupied. Ayisha had told most of the truth when she said in El-Kalil that her people lived in tents.

We walked down the paved street of a city between oleander-bushes that had forced themselves up between the cracks, toward an enormous open amphitheater hewn by the Romans out of a hillside, with countless tiers of ruined stone seats rising one above the other like giant steps.

In the center of that the tents were pitched, and the only building in use was a great half-open cave on another hillside, in which Ayisha told us Ali Higg himself lived, overlooking the entire camp and directing its destinies.

On the top of the mountain in front of us was the tomb of Aaron, Moses' brother. On another mountain farther off stood a great crusader castle all in ruins; and to left and right were endless remains of a civilization that throve when the British were living in mud-and-wattle huts. The dry climate had preserved it all; but there was water enough; it only needed the labor of a thousand men to remake a city of it.

We avoided the amphitheater with its hundreds of tents pitched inside and all about it, because Ayisha said the women would come running out to greet her, and she did not desire that any more than we did. So we turned to the right, and started up a flight of steps nearly a mile long that led to an ancient place of sacrifice; two hundred yards up that the track turned off that led to Ali Higg's cavern.

It was there, where the broken steps and side-track met, that the first men came hurrying to meet us and blocked our way—four of them, active as goats, and looking fierce enough to scare away twice their number. But they recognized Ayisha, and stood aside at once to let us pass, showing her considerable gruff respect and asking a string of questions, which she countered with platitudes. They did not follow us, but stayed on guard at the corner, as if the meeting between Ali Higg and his wife were something to keep from prying eyes.

So the far-famed Ali Higg was alone in his great cave when we reached it, sitting near the entrance propped on skins and cushions with a perfect armory of weapons on the floor beside him. The interior was hung with fine Bokhara embroideries, and every inch of the floor was covered with rugs.

There was another cave opening into that in which he sat; and it, too, was richly decorated; but the sound of women's voices that we heard came from a third cave around the corner of the cliff wall, not connected. Ali Higg was apparently in no mood for female company—or any other kind.

In the shadow of the overhanging rock he looked so like Grim it was laughable. He was a caricature of our man, with all the refinement and humor subtly changed into irritable anger. He looked as if he would scream if you touched him, and no wonder; for the back of the poor fellow's neck, half-hidden by the folds of his head-cloth, was a perfect mess of boils that made every movement of his head an agony.

His eyes were darker than Grim's, and blazed as surely no white man's ever did; and his likeness to Grim was lessened by the fact that he had not been shaved for a day or two, and the sparse black hair coarsened the outline of his chin and jaw. In spite of his illness he had not laid aside the bandoleer that crossed his breast, nor the two daggers tucked into his waist-cloth. And he laid his hand on a modern British army rifle the minute he caught sight of us.

NARAYAN SINGH and I both bowed and, after greeting him with the proper sonorous blessing, stood aside to let Ayisha approach. We should have demeaned ourselves in his eyes, and hers as well, if we had walked behind her. He nodded to us curtly, and almost smiled

at her; but that one wry twist of the lips was his nearest approach to pleasantry that morning.

She knelt and kissed his hands and feet, waiting to speak until she was spoken to; and he did not speak to her at all, but signed to her with a tap on the head and a gesture to take her place on the rug behind him. Then at a motion from me Ali Baba's two sons brought forward the presents and the medicine-chest, setting them down before him in the cave mouth.

The presents were pretty good, I thought. I would not have minded owning them myself; but he eyed them dully. There was a set of Solingen razors, marked in Arabic with the days of the week; a cloak of blue-and-white-striped cloth, fit for any prince of Bedouins; and an ormolu clock with a gong inside it that would have graced the chimney-piece of a Brooklyn boarding-house.

"*Mar'habal*"* he said at last, by way of acknowledging our existence, after he had stared at the presents for about two minutes sourly; and I took that for permission to say my little piece.

So I delivered Grim's message, saying that he was a most God-fearing and hard-fighting sheikh from Palestine, who had had the honor to escort his mightiness' wife to Petra, and now, learning of the illness of the famous Lion of Petra, whom might Allah bless forever, rather than postpone his devotions had sent me, his *hakim*, schooled in medicine at Lahore University, and a *darwaish* to boot, to offer such relief as my modest skill might compass.

That was a good long speech to get off in Arabic, for a comparative beginner. I rather expected him to smile or say something pleasant in return, but he didn't.

"By Allah, you have come to poison me!" he growled. "All *hakims* are alike. There was an Egyptian tried it a month ago. Look yonder on the ledge, where his skull hangs. May devils burn his soul!"

It was easy enough to look shocked at that suggestion. He had the drop on me for one thing; and for another, Ayisha was whispering to him, and I couldn't guess whether she was betraying me or not. It turned out that that young woman was much too bent on swapping owners to do anything but smooth our path; but I wasn't so sure of that then as Narayan Singh seemed to be, and as, for that matter, Grim was too.

But he seemed to grow a little less irascible, until she leaned too close to him and touched his neck. Then he went off like a pent-up volcano, and cursed her until she shuddered; and her fright gave him no satisfaction, because he could not turn his head to look at her.

"Where is this cursed person?" he demanded, meaning Grim, of course.

"He rests at the treasury of Pharaoh," said I, hoping that as Narayan Singh and I both stood exactly in front of him he might not catch sight of Grim's movements in the valley below.

"How did he enter Petra without my leave?" he demanded.

I took a good long pause, for that was an awkward question. I could not very well admit that Grim had seized and imprisoned his watchmen. But Narayan Singh strode into the breach.

"The Lion's jackals slept," he announced in a voice of righteous indignation. "There was none to give our great Sheikh Jimgrim as much as Allah's blessing. Nevertheless, he sends these presents."

Without answering that Ali Higg clapped his hands twice, and a woman came around the corner from a near-by cave. By her bearing she was either a junior wife or a concubine, and she greeted Ayisha like a sister with a great pow wow of blessing and reply. But Ali Higg cut all that short. He was no sentimentalist.

"Find Shammas Abdul," he ordered her. "Order him to take camel and meet the men returning from the Beni Aroun raid. Let him bid them hurry. Go!"

She obeyed on the run. There was discipline in that man's camp, as long as he was looking. But Ayisha followed the woman out, and whether she herself found Shammas Abdul, or whether she contrived to pervert the junior wife, Grim presently became aware of that move to summon forty men, and governed himself accordingly.

For about a minute Ali Higg fixed baleful eyes on me.

"You are a Shia!" he snapped suddenly. "A Persian! A cursed heretic!"

A look of pained surprize was the best retort I could accomplish, but Narayan Singh came to the rescue again. He thumped a fist on his chest as if it were a drum, and glared indignantly.

*Greeting.

"Would I, a Pathan of the Orakzai, demean myself by being servant to a Persian?" he demanded. "Lo! We bring gifts. What manner of desert man are you that reward us with insults!"

"Peace!" I said. "Peace!" remembering the Sikh's counsel about the middle course I should pursue. "The Lion is sick. May Allah take pity on him!"

Narayan Singh growled in his beard by way of submitting to the mild rebuke, and Ali Higg—a little bit impressed perhaps—proceeded to question me on doctrine and theology, showing a zeal for splitting hairs that would have done credit to a Cairo *m'allim*. But I had had lots of instruction on those points, and in fact surprized him with a trite fanaticism equal to his own, ending up with a statement that whoever did not believe every article and precept of the Sunni faith not only was damned forever beyond hope, but should be dispatched in a hurry to face the dreadful consequences.

His eyes softened considerably at that; and for the moment I think he almost approved of me, in spite of the foreign accent that must have grated on his ears, and his national dislike of any one who hailed from India. He actually told both of us to be seated, and clapped his hands again. Another woman came, looking dreadfully afraid of him.

"Coffee!" he ordered.

We sat down on the ledge of rock in front of him, for although it was hardly wise to seem too deferent it would have been more unwise to move away and give him an unobstructed view of the valley, where Grim might be in sight or might not be. Our job was to gain time.

He did not say a word until the coffee came, beyond swearing scandalously when he moved his head and hurt the boils.

"O Allah, may Your neck hurt You as mine does me!"

I thought that pretty good for such a hard-and-fast doctrinaire, but it was almost mild compared to some of his other remarks.

THE woman brought the coffee on a tray in little silver cups—as good and as well served as if our host were a Cairene pasha; but our irascible host took none, for Ayisha called out and warned him not to, saying it would heat his boils.

She came like the wife of Heber the Kenite, who slew Sisera, "bringing forth butter in a lordly dish." She held in both hands a marvelous Persian rose-bowl half-filled with clabber, saying she had prepared it for her lord herself, and offered it to him on bended knees.

I could not see her face, for her back was toward me and she had the shawl over her head, but I thought of that little vial of croton oil Narayan Singh had given her instead of poison, and the Sikh caught my eye meaningly.

Ali Higg was pleased to condescend. He took the bowl in both hands, muttered a blessing, and drank deep, swallowing about half the stuff before he noticed its strange flavor. Then he flung the priceless bowl away from him, smashing it to atoms, and picked up his rifle to take aim at Ayisha.

"By Allah, the *bint** has poisoned me!"

She screamed and ran. He fired, but she was already past the corner, and the bullet grazed the rock. Moreover, croton oil is a drastic strong cathartic, and waits on no man's convenience. He dropped the rifle, groaned—and I would rather not set down quite all the rest.

Sufficient that it gave Narayan Singh and me our opportunity. It made him too weak to resist, and we took care of him. I let him go on believing he was poisoned, and gave him harmless doses that he presently believed had saved his life; so that even that tyrannical fanatic felt a kind of gratitude.

Held like a baby in the Sikh's enormous arms, with no less than half a dozen terrified women looking on—for they had all run one way while Ayisha ran the other—he slowly recovered control of his emotions, while the women loudly praised my medicinal skill.

And since I knew almost nothing at all of medicine, and therefore could say anything I chose without feeling guilty—like the fellow on a soap-box who harangues a crowd on politics—I told him he must have the boils lanced there and then or otherwise the poison might get to them and inflame them beyond all hope.

I suppose the men who had met us at the corner of the great flight of steps did not come and interrupt because they had had enough of his temper for one morning and did not choose to sample it again uninvited. The rifle-shot did not bring them

*Literally girl; about as respectful as the word "skirt" would be if used of one's wife.

because it was nothing new for him to vent displeasure by shooting at folk; and if there were a corpse, and it had not fallen over the cliff or been kicked over, they would come and remove it when ordered, but certainly not sooner.

Ali Higg had strength enough left to assure me that if I killed him he would wait for me in the next world and settle the account there. I told him what was perfectly true, that I would rather lose my hand than kill him, so he added that if I hurt him more than was reasonable four camels should be told off afterward to hurt me.

Seeing he was to be sole judge of what was reasonable pain, and having no means of guessing whether Grim was still alive and able to protect me, I decided to give him a hypodermic, and put a shot into his arm that would have quieted a *must* elephant. Maybe I rather overdid that, but as I have no medical diploma nobody can call me to account.

And the operation was successful, if unpleasant. I used one of the presentation razors.

THEN Grim came, striding up the mountain-ledge with Ali Baba and all the rest of the gang at his tail, but no sign anywhere of Jael Higg. He stood and boomed out a sonorous Arab blessing; and if ever a man felt and looked like a trapped wild beast it was that Lord of the Limits of the Desert and Lion of Petra, Ali Higg.

However, Narayan Singh and I had played our part and got him weak enough; he could not even jump to grab his rifle. The rest was clearly up to Grim, who looked in no hurry at all.

He stood in the cave entrance with the light behind him, turning slightly sidewise to let Ali Higg see him in profile. The Lion's jaw dropped. Grim's very headdress was striped like Ali Higg's. His cloak was the same color. He had been dressed rather differently when I last saw him, so he must have been doing some pretty careful spy-work.

Of course, a close examination showed a dozen differences between the two men, but in his weak state following that drastic physic and the operation Ali Higg believed for a moment that he saw his own ghost! One or two of the women checked a scream, which helped matters, and the others shrank into a corner, staring with wild eyes. One woman laughed, but not from amusement.

"*Salamun alaik*, O Ali Higg!" said Grim after a full minute's silence.

"*Wa alaik issalam!* Who are you, in the name of Allah?"

Instead of answering Grim strode in, and Ali Baba lined up his sons across the cave mouth. Unless Grim had left undone some precaution in the camp below it looked as if we had the Lion caged to rights, and you could tell by the look in Ali Baba's usually mild old eyes that there would have been short shrift for somebody if his advice were taken. For a moment I caught sight of Ayisha, peering timidly between the end man and the wall—to see, I suppose, whether the Lion was dead yet—but the minute I caught her eye she disappeared.

Grim stooped down over Ali Higg, who was sprawling on his stomach on a Persian rug.

"Has my *hakim* relieved your honor's pain?" he asked.

The Lion managed to sit upright. Three of the women piled cushions behind him and ran back again to their corner.

"Who are you in my likeness?"

"A friend, *inshallah*," answered Grim.

He squatted down cross-legged on the mat in front of him; for though the Lion's neck was pretty nicely bandaged and the hypodermic had not lost its power, yet it hurt him quite a little to look up.

"I had three brothers, but thou art none of them. I had one son, but neither art thou he. In the name of the All-Knowing, name thyself!"

"I am he," said Grim, "who brought your honor's wife from El-Kalil."

"Oh! And a million curses on the *bint!* She tried within the hour to poison me. But for this Indian of thine I were a dead man now. Stay! Send for her!"

He clapped his hands.

"Let her be flung over the cliff. Go bring her!"

But nobody moved to do his bidding, and it dawned on him a second time that he was cornered. He wasn't a man who took such discovery mildly.

"Ayisha shall be dealt with at the proper time!" he snarled. "I have not accepted those gifts. Take them up! You who have entered Petra without my leave shall

account to my men presently. Thereafter we will talk of gifts."

"Which men?" Grim asked him blandly. "Surely not the forty and four, who went to raid the Beni Aroun? Nay, I took the liberty of sending them a message signed with your honor's seal. They will not come for a day or two, so we can make friends undisturbed."

"*Shu halalk?* With my seal?"

"With your honor's seal. Observe; I have it."

"Then—then— Where is she into whose hands I gave it?"

That was the first sign Ali Higg had given of the slightest affection for any one. His face looked ghastly at the thought of losing that strange, half-western wife of his.

He had called Ayisha by her name in front of strangers, out of disrespect. Jael he would not name, even when confronted by the proof that she had broken trust and lost his precious seal.

"I took another liberty," said Grim. "I sent word by messenger, who bore a letter sealed with that same seal, to Ibrahim ben Ah. He will neither raid El-Maan nor return to Petra."

"He is defeated?" asked the Lion, dumbfounded. "And she—is she a prisoner?"

Grim did not answer either question.

"And I met a man named Yussuf. You know him?"

"*Naam.*" (Yes.)

"He has been lying to your honor. He has said that the British are helpless. He brought your honor a report from Palestine that was a skein of falsehood hung up on little pegs of truth. He told you the British are not able to defend themselves, he knowing better; for he is one of those men who say always what the hearer would like to hear."

"What has that to do with thee?" demanded Ali Higg.

He was looking about him furtively, and Narayan Singh picked up his rifle off the rug and stood it against the wall. Grim turned toward Ali Baba.

"Bring Yussuf!" he ordered.

The ranks opened, and Yussuf was thrust forward into the cave, where he stood looking like a felon awaiting sentence.

"Did you speak truth, or did you lie to the Lion of Petra?" Grim demanded.

"Who am I that should know the truth of such matters?" the man whined, his voice squeaking like a cart-wheel. "I obeyed. I looked. I asked. Perhaps I did not understand all I saw and what was told me."

"Is the Lion of Petra with tenscore fighting men able to stand against the British with twenty thousand?" Grim asked him.

"*Inshallah.* The Lion is brave. Who knows? Yet I forgot to speak of the twenty aeroplanes at Ludd, each having ten bombs of a hundred pounds weight that could make short work in an hour or two of ten score men."

"Why don't they come?" snarled Ali Higg.

"They take no delight in slaying the women and children," answered Grim. "Those black tents below there would be an easy mark to aim at; but who would gain? It is better that peace were kept."

"Throw that Yussuf over the cliff!" commanded Ali Higg.

But once more nobody moved to obey him; and Yussuf had the indecency to smirk, for which Grim cursed him with whip-lash sarcasm.

Then Ali Higg put both hands before his face and prayed aloud:

"O Allah, Lord of mercies and of wisdom and rebuke, if I am in the hands of enemies and she who was the mother of good plans is taken away from me; have I not, nevertheless, smitten the heretic in thy name and raised thy banner over Petra? Give me then wisdom, that I deal with these men and confound thy enemies. *La Allah illa Allah!*"

He dropped his hands and looked up with a hard, fanatical frenzy in his eyes. But they changed almost instantly. The ranks of Ali Baba's men opened once more; and Jael Higg stepped through, dressed like a fighting Bedouin, bandoleer and all. Grim had even let her have a rifle and cartridges. As he promised, he had put her to no indignity.

## CHAPTER XIII

*"There is a trick to ruling!"*

DON'T you hate a story with a moral in it? I do. This is an immoral story. And remember, I said in the beginning that it had no end, but was no more than an episode in the career of Ali Higg. I would have liked to tell it from his viewpoint, setting down what he thought of this

unexpected stick thrown in his wheel, omitting most of the bad language for the censor's sake.

His first thought was that Jael had returned from the raid with a hundred and forty men. You could tell that by the light in his eyes, even before he spoke.

"Allah reward you; you come in time! Have Ayisha and that Yussuf thrown over the cliff. Praised be Allah, I shall be obeyed at last!"

It was his worst shock yet when even Jael did not start at once to carry out his order. Instead, she sat down on the rug, so that she and Ali Higg and Grim formed a triangle.

"O Lion of Petra," she said—for it would not have been manners to call him by his right name in front of strangers—"what was written has come to pass, and my foreboding was a true one. If we had let the tribes at El-Maan be, and if you had kept those forty men instead of sending them to raid the Beni Aroun, this could not have happened. Now twenty men have cornered us, while Ibrahim ben Ah eats up provisions to no purpose sitting idly in the desert."

"Then the El-Maan men were not scattered to the winds?" groaned Ali Higg. "O Allah, may shame devour you as it tortures me! Those dogs will have looted a train, and will say that Ali Higg no longer dares interfere! The sun rises, but it sets at evening, since Allah wills; but is my day so short?"

"By no means," answered Grim. "The El-Maan men saw me and believed I was the Lion of Petra. I forbade the looting of the train, and your honor's wife Ayisha went to El-Maan to enforce obedience by her presence.

"Later they saw me start for Petra when the train had passed; and now they will learn that Ibrahim ben Ah with sevenscore men is bivouacking in the desert. The world is round, O Ali Higg, so that where in one place it seems dark in another they say the sun is rising."

"In Allah's name, who art thou?" asked the Lion.

"James Schuyler Grim. Men call me Jimgrim."

"Allah! *Wallahi haida fasl!** Not he who fought under Lawrence against the Turks? *Wallah!* I fought on the other side, but we all feared Lawrence and admired him so that not a man would try to capture him, although Djemal Pasha put a great price on his head. And you were known far and wide as his man! There was a price on your head too—dead or alive—five thousand pounds Turkish—well I remember it. By the beard of the Prophet, you might have come here as a friend, O Jimgrim!"

Grim laughed.

"I come as a friend in any case," he answered.

"*Khajjaltni bima'rufak!** You brought back a woman to poison me!"

And this is where the immorality comes in. I told a lie, and don't regret it. Nor did Grim regret it; and he backed me up. And Narayan Singh supported both of us.

The lie was my own idea entirely, invented on the spur of that moment; and afterward, when old Ali Baba named me the "father of lies" on the strength of it, I felt extremely proud, as he intended that I should do. The lie worked.

I said:

"O Ali Higg, men said of you that you are a fierce man, swift in wrath and slow to take advice. And others said that you are sick with burning boils; yet who shall go into the Lion's den and heal him? And Ayisha said to me:

" 'Thou art a *hakim*, yet he will never listen to thee. But he is my lord, and shall I see him linger in agony? Give me a potion that will weaken him. Then in his weakness he will call for help, and thou shalt heal the boils. And afterward that which is written shall come to pass. If in great wrath because I mixed the potion in his drink he shall have me slain, nevertheless the Lion will be whole again; and who am I compared to him?' So said the lady Ayisha."

I know Grim would have given a hundred dollars for leave to laugh then right out in meeting; but he kept a straight face, and he had so contrived to make Jael Higg afraid of him that, though she looked scandalized, she held her tongue. And Narayan Singh, as I said, supported me.

"These words are true, O Lion of Petra," he boomed out. "I heard the lady Ayisha speak, and it was I who put the little vial in her hands. By the beard of the Prophet I swear the words are true!"

But as he is a Sikh, and therefore believes

*By ——, this is a strange happening!

*You shame me with your friendship!

that the prophet of El-Islam was a liar and imposter, with a beard as fit to be dishonored as his fiery creed, perhaps his perjury was scarcely technical. Anyhow I am not the recording angel. And Grim said, being a more cautious liar than the rest of us—

"Therefore, O Lion of Petra, mercy is due to the lady Ayisha, seeing that the end in view was good, although the means were questionable."

But Jael Higg looked daggers at her lord. She had made up her mind to reduce that establishment by one at least; and Ali Higg, looking in her eyes, read what all polygamous husbands have had to face ever since the day when Abraham was forced to drive out Hagar into the wilderness. So he pronounced one of those Solomon-like judgments that are the secret of a man's rule over men in that land, granting to each contender the whole of what he asked, yet having his own way in the bargain.

"I find she is not worthy of death," he said, "since she played a trick that brought me comfort. Yet I will not endure a woman's tricks, nor condone the offense. I divorce her. Before witnesses I say she is divorced."

It's a simple affair in that land; isn't it? But there were matters not so simple to attend to, and Grim saw fit to waste no further time.

"I said I come as a friend," he resumed.

"I heard it!" the Lion answered dryly.

"Without boasting, I have saved you from destruction, while delivering your purchases from El-Kalil. And I have done your name no harm, but good on the countryside."

"Allah! How have you saved me from destruction?"

"By preventing that unwise raid on El-Maan."

"*Wallahi!* Do you think my men could not have accomplished it?"

"Maybe. Do you think the British would be fools enough to let that go unpunished? The El-Maan people would surely have appealed to them. Aeroplanes would have been sent to bomb you out of Petra. Can you fight aeroplanes?"

"The British do not pretend to rule on this side of the Jordan," the Lion retorted.

"No. Do you want them to pretend to?"

"Allah forbid!"

"Then take a friend's advice, O Ali Higg, and keep the peace here rather than make war."

"That is good advice; but will the British make a treaty with me?"

"No," Grim answered, smiling. "By that they would recognize you as a ruler, which they will not do until they surely know you rule."

"*Mashallah!* How shall men know that I am ruler unless I make war and enforce my will?"

"Have I made war on you?" asked Grim. "Have I disarmed you, or killed one man? Yet I enforce my will, as you shall see."

"By a trick! You played a trick on me, or otherwise——"

"There is a trick to ruling," answered Grim.

"By the beard of the Prophet, that is true! But show me a trick that can defeat eight hundred men. The Sheikh of Abu Lissan plans to come against me. Those El-Maan dogs had heard of it, and so had the Beni Aroun; therefore I planned to crush them first before dealing with Abu Lissan. Show me a trick that can defeat the Abu Lissan men, and surely I will call thee friend!"

"Suppose we make a bargain then," said Grim.

"*Taib.* I am ready."

"Giving pledges for fulfilment."

"You mean I shall give pledges to the British?"

"Hardly," Grim answered. "If they took a pledge from you, that would be like signing a treaty, wouldn't it? I have no authority to sign a treaty. This must be a bargain between me and thee."

"*Taib.*"

"It is known," said Grim, "that you have money on deposit with the Bank of Egypt."

"A lie! A lie!" snapped Ali Higg. "Who said it?"

"Fifty thousand pounds in gold was the exact amount, deposited at six per cent., and interest to be compounded every half-year," said Grim. "And because the Koran denounces usury by Moslems, and you are a pious man—and also perhaps because of the risk attached to using your name in the matter—your wife Jael's name was used. Nevertheless, your seal was used at the time as a check on her. Now, at a word from me the British would impound that money, interest and all."

"A murrain on them! But you spoke of being friends?"

"And of a pledge between you and me. In proof that I speak as a friend, though I had your seal I have returned it."

Jael Higg confirmed that by displaying it in the hollow of her hand.

"You can't possibly prevent a message from me reaching British territory," Grim went on. "A letter is written already, and you don't know which man has it. You are not my prisoner. I intend to leave you free and unharmed. It is possible you might attack me when I go, and kill me and some of my men; but the rest would escape. And then would come aeroplanes, and you would never see that money in the Bank of Egypt."

The Lion blinked away steadily, looking so absurdly like Grim in some respects, and so utterly unlike him in character nevertheless, that it looked like plus opposing minus, or a strong man tempted by his baser self.

"Therefore," continued Grim, "if you will promise me to raid no more villages, I will undertake to deal with the Sheikh of Abu Lissan. But as a pledge, Jael and you must sign and seal a letter to the Bank of Egypt stipulating that the fifty thousand pounds shall not be withdrawn for three years. As long as you keep your promise that money of yours shall be safe, with no questions asked as to how you came by it; for I shall not say a word about it to the British Government, making only a sealed report, which shall be locked away and never opened unless you break the bargain."

"And at the end of three years?"

"Who knows?" Grim answered. "The years are on the lap of Allah. By then we may all be dead, or you may be king, or may be weary of politics—who knows?"

"And if I refuse?"

"Aeroplanes!"

"But how shall I believe you?"

"Do I not pledge my life?" Grim answered. "I have said that I will go to Abu Lissan."

"Allah! Why don't you send the aeroplanes to Abu Lissan? Blot the dogs out! Destroy them! Why not?"

"Would it not be easier to send them here?" asked Grim. "This is only part way. You, who found it easier to crush the smaller first, tell me why the aeroplanes should not come first to Petra!"

"*Wallahi!* I wish I had aeroplanes!"

"But you haven't. Choose now: Will you make that bargain with me, or shall I go straight back from here to Palestine and make my report to the administrator? Never doubt that I can get back; I know where your men are, and I know the desert trails as well as you do. You and your few men that you have here and the women might attack us in the Wady Musa,* but I would prevent that by taking you and Jael with me until we reached the open."

"You talk boldly," the Lion sneered. "If you think you can take us with you that far, then why not to Jerusalem? The words of a boaster are a mask of doubt. Hah! Take us to Jerusalem! Why not?"

"Because then," Grim answered, "there would be tenscore cutthroats at large without a leader who can hold them. One Lion can keep a bargain, but tenscore jackals would ruin a countryside."

Ali Higg turned that over in his mind for five full minutes, like a chess-player refusing to admit that he is mated. But there wasn't a move left to him, and Jael went closer on her knees to whisper advice in his ear.

"I agree," he said at last. "As Allah is my witness, I agree. Let us be friends, O Jimgrim!"

Grim shook hands with him and offered him a cigaret, while Ali Baba's men outside the cave sent up a great shout of victory. Then to Ali Higg's inexpressible delight Mahommed started to sing the Akbar song, and they all roared the chorus:

*"Akbar! Akbar! Akbar Ali Higg!"*

The song put everybody in good temper, so that when Jael wrote out a letter to the bank at Grim's dictation Ali Higg affixed the seal to it without a murmur and ordered food supplied at once to all Grim's men; and we had a feast up there on the ledge outside the cave—in sight of the very spot where Amaziah, king of Israel, once hurled ten thousand of his enemies into the gorge below—that in some respects was the most enjoyable I ever shared.

But Grim was not the man to spoil success by lingering in what might yet turn into a trap. He who sups with the devil should not sit long at the feast; and I warned you this was a story without an end to it.

*The name of the valley that leads into Petra.

THERE is the lady Ayisha, and what became of her; and the account of when and in what way the Lion kept his bargain. Well, have you heard of those tale-tellers in the East, who sit under a village tree with the men-folk all around them? They work up to the climax, and then pause, and pass the begging-bowl for whatever the tale is worth. I fear those masters of inducement would mock me as a tyro for having already told too much before the pause!

# THE BURIAL OF BILLY

## by CAPTAIN DINGLE

*Author of "The Liar," "Tides of Hate," etc.*

THERE was something very much amiss when a difficulty found Red Saunders incapable of grinning in the face of the world. He had been dubious about visiting Serang from the beginning; for the Molukkas are Dutch Islands, and he had never enjoyed a very favorable reputation with the Dutchmen since the time when he undertook to unearth an undiscoverable illicit still on Amboyna, and succeeded—only to find that the almost hysterical official who had enlisted his aid was the real proprietor of the apparatus, who only wanted to make a show of zeal for political purposes, and thoroughly believed his illegal liquor factory would defy the sharpest eyes.

He had never met Saunders. That explains much.

Also it explains in part why old Tod Carter had right on his side for once when he entered a growl against venturing into those seas again.

"Ain't you never goin' to learn to leave well alone?" the grizzled old mate complained. "What good's a few passels o' coffee and spices and sich-like to you? Besides, that old Dutchman——"

"S-sh!" Saunders had smiled in answer. "Perhaps we'll get a few nutmegs, too, old hoss. And Serang's over the way from Amboyna. Quite another country, d'ye see? Something tells me there ought to be profitable trade there, especially if we jog the memories of a few of the fat ones about that arrack distillery last year."

"Huh! You'll play with the fire 'til you get burned!" was Carter's retort to that; and once his retort was made he forgot his grievance and followed his skipper blindly, as always.

Now Tod Carter languished in a steamy, cockroachy jail in the full glare of the sun back of the beach of Hoya Bay. And Red Saunders for once was incapable of summoning his customary sunny smile as he wended shoreward bent upon Carter's release.

The incarceration of grim, growling old Tod Carter was something far too serious even to get mad about. It was nothing short of disaster, and as such was to be dealt with utterly without levity.

Straight to the office of the collector of the port the big skipper went, and little native fishermen and big, gross Dutch traders and petty officials alike stopped and stared after

him as he swung past. There were few ports where business might be done where the schooner *Black Pearl* and her big, smiling skipper were not known, at least by repute if not by experience; and here in Serang, though his one and only previous visit had been over a year back, things had happened that insured his recognition when next he appeared.

The one thing to be hoped for was that the collector might have been replaced by a new man from home, who might be too fresh, and therefore too honest, to uphold any ancient grudge held by his predecessor against Saunders. Carter himself had suggested that he go first to interview the official. Now Carter was in jail, and still there remained the doubt as to the identity of the collector.

"He'll produce, whoever he is!" the skipper had growled at hearing the news.

Now he burst into the official's office without knocking, and the smile which had fled from his ruddy, good-looking face returned, for the collector was a new man; and more, he was a fat little man of jolly aspect outwardly, with apple-cheeks, twinkling blue eyes, and a roly-poly paunch which seemed to be continually shaking with internal mirth.

The twinkle of his little blue eyes and the tremulousness of his little round paunch were perpetual. Before the door had swung shut behind him the skipper had noticed that. Neither surprize, alarm, indignation, anything whatever, appeared to ruffle the jolly complacency of the fat little Dutchman of Serang.

"Good day, *mynheer*," the skipper began without waste of time. "I've come for my mate, Tod Carter. Don't seem to call you to mind at the moment. Another man here last year, I believe. Glad to know you, anyhow. Have Carter brought, will you?"

The little blue eyes beamed unwaveringly. The little round paunch shook until the fat little hands clasped over its fair rotundity quivered in sympathy.

"You are Captain Saunders—Red Saunders—" the Dutchman chuckled. "*Ja*, I know you, captain. Who does not know you? You have not seen me, no. Between Amboyna and Serang and Buru has been what you call a shuffling. So! But your mate Carter, he is arrested, I believe, for assault. He can not be released until the commissioner comes around next month to try him."

Saunders knew very well that the commissioner from Amboyna made only monthly visits around his district for the dispensation of justice spelled Dutch fashion; and he was well aware that the fat little gentleman so mildly regarding him not only had the power to make and hold a prisoner, as obviously he had done, but he was the final court of decision as to what offenses were grievous enough to go to the commissioner, and which were trivial enough to come under his own ruling entirely.

"*Mynheer*," he replied quietly, "I know old Tod Carter like I know my own schooner. I don't seem able to picture him assaulting anybody unprovoked. And I want to sail tonight."

The collector shrugged his plump shoulders, and just for an instant the gleam of uneven teeth might be seen between slightly parted, thick, red lips. One pudgy hand drummed on the wide mahogany table before him, the other idly ruffled a heap of dusty papers.

Saunders could have sworn that the twinkle in the little blue eyes hardened to a glitter for a second; he half-suspected that idle ruffling of papers, not in the least connected with the matter in hand, to be merely a means of concealing a fleeting spasm of nervousness or temper. But the fat little man was suave and genial again when he answered:

"Your sailing shall not be hindered, captain. I believe there is nothing against you—here. And no doubt your mate is well known to you. But you are a little hard of hearing, yes? I said your man Carter is held for assault. Assault, you know; hitting a man, captain—knocking him down. Very serious, oh my! Perhaps next time you come here he shall be free.

"Now, is there anything I can do for you, captain? I'm afraid there's little in your line in the Moluccas. Liquor is restricted to one quart per man per month, as you know, and there's little done in opium; market's poor in both. A few tons of nutmegs now, or coffee——"

The collector had risen, and stood looking up into the skipper's face from the pudgy level of his five-feet-four, his red face and blue eyes the embodiment of cheery good humor. Yet there was an air, indefinable but not to be ignored, of cold, scheming,

The Molukka Islands are between Celebes and New Guinea.

dangerous hostility about the entire situation that at once put Saunders on guard.

A first impulse to squeeze that fat smile away by taking the fat throat in hand was repressed; a saner notion, no less likely to succeed because of its suddenness, took its place, and the little official positively purred with greasy satisfaction when Red met smile with smile as sunny and replied:

"Thanks, *mynheer*, I believe I won't bother about cargo if I can't have my old mate. I realize duty is duty, and you're but doing yours by holding on to old Tod if he's been kicking up didoes. I'll pull out tonight, and call back later to pick him up when he's done his bit.

"I suppose you won't object to me seeing the old fool? I'd like to leave him some tobacco, and just whisper in his lugs my opinion of him, putting me in a hole like this."

*Mynheer's* fat smile had faded a little when Saunders announced his intention of immediately departing. It glowed again now.

"Assuredly I can give you a permit to visit the jail, captain. And perhaps you may find it worth your while to look into the cargo possibilities before you sail. I believe there are a few tons or so of paying freight——"

"Freight won't pay me—at freight rates," grinned Saunders, a hand on the door, the other extended for the permit being written out.

As the collector handed him the slip of paper eye met eye again, and again Saunders experienced that indefinable air of threat, in no way reconcilable with the chubby little man before him.

"Captain, some freight pays better than another," smiled the Dutchman, and slowly winked. "Anyway, go visit your man, and if you'll do me the honor of dining with me this——"

"I'll let you know in an hour or so, *mynheer*, thanks. But while we're talking of dining, it'll be better if you dine with me aboard the schooner. Anyway I'll be back as soon as I've seen Carter and had a look around."

Saunders hurried out and plunged into the back lanes of Teluti town. As he threaded the narrow and odorous alleys he chuckled hugely, for he was well aware that he was followed; and he had, moreover, placed his own construction upon the collector's apparent anxiety to do him honor even while official duty demanded that his chief officer be detained in durance vile.

That construction indicated an interest rather more than friendly, and, if correct, pointed a way out of the difficulty which might prove profitable as well as satisfactory. It only remained for him to talk with Tod Carter for five minutes to assure him upon one point at present not exactly certain. After that—well.

Purposely taking a roundabout route to the little jail outside town, the skipper kept his sharp eyes busy as he neared the compound fence, inside which were all the jail buildings, the convict-labor stores, and the tiny, sparsely filled cemetery where the prisoners released by death slept on in peace.

The fields inside the fence were dotted with stooping laborers cultivating vegetables, and Saunders laughed aloud at the vision he conjured up of gray, grizzled old Tod Carter, a sailor who detested the very nature of earth, who might raise —— on occasion but surely never anything growable in dirt, stooping over furrowed soil, grubbing with a hoe to work out his sentence. The thought reminded him of his errand.

To give color to his request for a permit, he doubled back on his tracks, bowled over a frightened native who had been shadowing him, and entered a native store for tobacco. Tossing a stick of the weed to the lurking native as he emerged with his purchase, the skipper now went directly to the jail entrance, presented his *chit* and waited with a great assumption of patience he was far from feeling.

Outside the door the native shadower lingered, doing what he had been told to do with more zeal than cunning; his mouth full of the skipper's tobacco, a half-stick gripped tightly in his fist, his big, soft, brown eyes remained fixed steadily upon the big sailor who had been pointed out to him as a bad-man, but who tossed sticks of tobacco about like chips of copra.

THE jailer beckoned, and Saunders followed through a dim, cool corridor, and into a blazing hot, stuffy, unventilated oven of a passage. On one side wall a square grill ten inches each way was let into a massive door, barred and bolted as if some criminal of world-wide notoriety in murder, at least, was behind it. And framed in the grill was the grim face of Tod Carter.

"Ho, you've come, hey? A —— long time it's took ye to get me out!" growled Carter, pacing up and down his cell with his face never beyond reach of the grill, waiting, as if for the most natural event in the world, for the release he was sure his captain had brought.

Saunders glanced around at the jailer. That bored worthy lounged in the passage, chewing a bit of stick.

"Here, old fellow, bite on this," smiled the skipper, and flung a stick of good tobacco to the man, who caught and bit on it with avidity.

"Now, Tod, old chap, wot's the trouble? Quick!" Saunders gritted, thrusting his face close to the grill.

Tod Carter leaned forward until his lips touched the cool iron bars, and gave his story out of the fulness of his experience with the skipper.

"Never get nigh to the big guy, cap'n!" he whispered. "Some yeller-tinted rat waylaid me soon's I got ashore, and said he knew you, knew what you'd come for, and knew there was a bit o' hot stuff cooked up for you. He said——"

"Did he tell you what we'd come for?" interrupted Saunders.

Carter grinned.

"Not in exact language, cappen. But he shore knew a good bit, at that. Said somethin' about a stock o' illicit liquor here which was to go to Batavia. 'Course, not knowing all your affairs, I went to see; and then I found he was a bloomin' stool-pigeon. So I makes a pass at him; he calls in the watch; and yere I am, a blessed convict unless you git me out."

The mate stopped, but his cell rumbled with convulsions of grim merriment.

"Flopped a few out, hey?" smiled Saunders, knowing all the signs.

"Oh, scrummy!" rumbled Carter, and marched around the cell before he could recover his breath.

"Listen," Red murmured, when the mate cooled down. "Did the fellow who got you here hint that he knew anything about our real errand?"

"No!" snapped Carter. "How could he know? Do I know?"

"Easy, old chap, easy!" smiled the skipper. "Sometimes it pays to keep all the dope under one hat. Anyhow it's all up with that now, I suppose. I thought we might get a legitimate cargo of good Dutch liquor duty-free for the Thursday Island trade. The fat little man I saw about your release told me, with a wink, too, that he might help me to a paying freight; but if you're going to be in here for a month before you know what they'll do to you in earnest——"

Saunders paused, keenly regarding the mate's grim face, and gradually a smile broke out. Tod Carter spat viciously, his blazing eyes close to the grating.

"And o' course you'll believe him, and take his payin' cargo! And o' course you'll believe the commissioner won't be here for a month! —— an' deep water!"

"Never fear, Tod, old fellow. I'll not believe anything that's not good for me. I had a hunch something was cooking for me in spite of that other business having happened over a year ago.

"So the commissioner's due here sooner, hey? Thought so. And Mynheer Collector can't oblige me by letting you loose, but he may give me a bit of freight that'll pay. H'm!"

"Yes, and the commissioner's due here day after tomorrow! You'll be loaded up

with illicit schnapps, if you're fool enough to stay, and then when the commissioner pops up they'll have you to rights. I'll go into the chain-gang on the roads, you'll be sent up to Java, and the schooner'll be confiscated. Lawd 'E knows what'll come o' the boys!"

"Let's not worry about them yet. I wonder, now, if the fat little Dutchman here was mixed up in that arrack business a year ago?"

"O' course he was!" snapped Carter impatiently. "Wasn't all three o' the collectors in it? Didn't they shuffle 'em around so's to smother it up? The Amboyna chap come here, I guess, the Buru feller went to Amboyna, and the Serang man's gone to Buru."

"Other way round," remarked Saunders musingly. "This man here isn't the one we fooled in Amboyna."

"What's it matter? Ain't it all one bunch?" demanded the mate.

But Saunders had stepped away from the grill. His strong face was alight with keen interest; to all appearance he had cast from his mind all thought of the collector and his affairs. At the end of the passage was a barred window which looked out upon the fields. He stood gazing out for a minute or two, then went back to the cell grill.

"It's such a fine day, Tod, I wonder they don't let you go out for exercise," he smiled.

The jailer hovered near, willing to be generous in minutes to the big sailor who was so well stocked with tobacco; but aware nevertheless that time was up, and he had his job to take care of.

"And is that the best you got to tell a feller?" snapped Carter angrily. "Fine weather, ho yes! And exercise ain't bad; but have I got to stop here then?"

"*MYNHEER CAPITAN*," the jailer put in softly, jingling his keys, "I veree sorry, but time he is up. The pris'ner he shall have exercise in field when sun he go down, sar. No can do in so hot sun. He not used to heem yet, an' also he ees not judged by commissioner yet. Mus' not treat heem hard, like convic', sar."

"There you are, Tod!" laughed Saunders, fishing out more tobacco, and also a flask of Hollands.

He handed both to the jailer, who gathered them in hungrily, glancing down the passage in fear as he stowed away the flask.

"I told you not ever to worry until the hangman draws the bolt. You'll get exercise, in the cool of the evening, old chap. It's fine out in the fields then. There's a nice shady spot—I noticed it as I came down—right along the western end of the north side. I must go now. Don't give away any secrets when you go before the judge. So long, Tod!"

Saunders chuckled as he turned away and heard the deep, soulful volley of curses hurled after him by the loyal old mate. Well he knew that any of his business, secrets or otherwise, would never be drawn or forced from Carter, no matter how terrible the threat. And he knew, too, that when the old chap's heat evaporated a little, he would sit down and puzzle over the precise words used by the skipper until he caught the message, if any, which might be hidden therein.

On his way out the skipper scrutinized the solid walls, the massive gates—relics from the early days of Dutch and Portuguese antagonism—and compared them amusedly with the almost effeminate, soft-voiced, soft-eyed little natives who seemed to be in sole charge of the prison.

Yet the locks were stout, the guns carried by the guards were no rusty, bent-barreled trade weapons, but real modern rifles, and, soft though they seemed, he knew these little natives could and would put up a stubborn fight. The outer fences he had already examined; they were tall and strongly formed of iron, with a *chevaux de fris* of barbed wire on the top. A man might get in; he could never get out.

"No chance!" he decided grimly. Then, smiling sunnily, he turned again to the jailer, who stood restlessly hopping on one foot after the other, hoping his visitor would go, yet unwilling to press his departure after receiving his generosity.

"Say, Mr. Jailer, how's the food in here?" Red asked softly. "Not so good, hey?"

"Ho, pris'ner food he —— awful, sar," the man grinned. "We fello' get more better food, but he make a dog seeck, all de same. You got biscuit?"

The man glanced hungrily at the wide pocket which had produced tobacco and schnapps already, as if it might yet yield up the succulent hard-tack. Red chuckled.

"No, sonny, I no got it hard-tack here.

But I'll send you some in an hour or so if you'll let me send in some grub for my mate inside. How about that? You can keep my own boy inside until the prisoner eats his supper, and hold him as hostage till you see Carter safe back in his cell. It's a shame to feed dog-food to a man anyway, isn't it?"

"Ho, yis, sar; no good. All right, s'pose can keep your boy here inside, cappen, I let heem give supper to Mynheer Carter. You no forget send biscuit for me?"

"I'll send you biscuit, and canned salmon too. Tell me what time you'll take Carter outside for exercise. He'll like to eat his supper outside much better. You can set somebody to watch him."

"Ho, sun go down two, t'ree hour. Den all mans not yet convic' go outside for one hour."

The skipper nodded and strode away, a cheery tune whistling through his lips his keen gray eyes dancing with merriment. Apparently ignoring everything except his route, still he took in and noted many things.

He saw, for instance, that the native subjects were not enamored of their Dutch masters; he saw some guns mounted on a grass-grown fort; he saw maybe half a dozen lazy soldiers lounging nearby; and as he again neared the office of the collector he saw several busy figures running to and fro between a big covered sampan moored off the beach, and the rear of the office.

He entered, as before, without knocking, and surprized a start of faint alarm on the collector's rubicund face, which resumed its customary smile swiftly.

"Well, *mynheer*, I've seen my old villain of a mate," the skipper said with obvious cheerfulness, as if forcing himself to speak and act resignedly. "I see there's nothing I can do. Now what about that cargo you spoke about? Better come on aboard my schooner and talk it over. There's turtle soup, turtle steak and a couple o' ducks for dinner, I know; and maybe you'll relish a peg or two of Scotch smoke now your island's dry, what?"

"The island is not so very dry, to one who knows, captain," the Dutchman replied with a fat smile and a sly droop of the left eyelid. "But we shall see. I, for one, am glad to find Captain Saunders a man of wisdom. Always had I heard that you were of the wise the wisest; but to speak truth, captain, when you burst in upon me today seeking your refractory mate I feared you might make me trouble. See how one may be mistaken!

"Here we are, friends at once, as it should be; I am going to eat bread and drink wine with you, and you are going to do me a favor and yourself much profit by carrying away a rich cargo which is ready to your hand. Ah, never have I been mistaken in my judgment of a man, captain. But for one leetle moment, I knew all the while that you would prove your detractors to be liars. Troublesome? Bah! You are a man after mine own heart, Captain Saunders!"

Beneath the little fat man's heartiness there was a current of jubilation that the skipper did not fail to detect. As they approached the rickety wharf, alongside which the *Black Pearl* schooner lay moored, his sunny smile grew positively dazzling, his chatter leaped from gay to riotously jocular, and the keen gray eyes that roved so swiftly and comprehendingly over the rippling waters of the breeze-ruffled bay and the silent, trim little schooner with its silent, capable island crew, snapped with the enthusiasm of a man entering upon a man-size battle of wits.

For, truth to speak, the battle for Tod Carter's liberty was on from the instant the little Dutchman stepped on the lowest batten of the *Black Pearl's* gangway.

THERE were two hours of daylight left, or more, when the skipper settled his guest in a lazy chair beneath the awning on the little quarter-deck, with frizzy-haired Tomba, the Fijian steward, in attendance bearing long tumblers that tinkled.

"Tomba," smiled Saunders, "I want a number one, first-chop dinner this evening. This gentleman dines with me, and he's none of your fish-eating islanders, Tomba; he knows what's what, savvee?"

"Me sabbee, cappen," replied Tomba woodenly, and went to his work below.

"Now, *mynheer*," the skipper suggested, when the long tumbler in the collector's pudgy fist was half-empty, and the fat, red face glowed with the combined effects of the welcome liquor and self-complacency, "I'll just tell off part of my crew for shore leave. Got to be mate and skipper too, y'know, since you collared Carter.

"And, by the way, I asked the jailer if I might send up some decent grub for the mate. If he was here he'd join us, y'see.

Any objection? I told the jailer he could hold my boy until he was sure there was no trick in it."

"No objection, Captain Saunders; none at all," the little official chuckled with a wave of the hand. "Give your mate a good feed. I can't say much for our prison food. As for tricks? Poof!"

He positively shook with merriment at the idea.

"We are not easily tricked, I can tell you."

"I believe it'll take a smart man to trick you, collector," Saunders smiled genially. "Anyhow I won't leave you alone very long. D'you mind giving me a *chit* to the prison, admitting my boy with Carter's grub? Or isn't it necessary?"

"Not needed, I assure you," beamed the collector blandly. "My men know their duty, and there is no need of anything more."

The skipper departed whistling as cheerily as if his mind was not at that very minute full of doubt and anxiety for his mate. Forward he called his native boatswain, Bonga Bob, and walked to the bows ostensibly to examine the trend and slack of the off-shore anchor cable. The wide arms of the open bay spread out fair to the southward; the shore-fasts twanged at times to the brisk seaward thrust of the crooning breeze off the land; beyond the little town—village would name the place better—loomed the jungled mountains, green and blue, crested with the gray sheen of naked rock; at one side the obsolete guns peeped over the grassy fort, humorously it seemed, yet holding a suggestion that they might, on occasion, frown as easily as grin. And aft, under the snowy white awning, a red, fat little face with twinkling blue eyes was fixed toward the bows with a smile of utter bliss—much like the storied smile on the face of the tiger.

Saunders took in that smile along with all the rest.

"Bonga Bob," he said softly, "that gentleman aft is the man who copped the mate. He's a very big man in Serang. Must treat him very respectfully, savvee?"

"Sabbee," grinned Bob, revealing a serrated row of blackened teeth.

"Very well, mind you do. Now here—" the skipper took out his note-book and pencil, and swiftly jotted down a sketch—"I want half the boys to go ashore now. There won't be any cargo until the morning, even if we wait for it. So tell off one watch, and you go with 'em, see? I'm sending Billy up to the jail with some supper for Mr. Carter. Wait until he starts, then follow him. He'll show you around town. And this—" handing the completed sketch to Bonga Bob—"give this to the carpenter. Tell him to make it and have it ready down below by sunset."

Bonga Bob vanished with the paper like a brown ghost, and the skipper strolled aft, whistling still. At the little galley he stopped, gave the smiling brown boy inside instructions regarding Carter's supper, added other instructions in a whisper which turned the boy's smile into a broad grin, and continued on aft to rejoin his guest.

"That's done," he remarked, settling his big bulk into an easy deck-chair and lighting a cheroot. "Let's have another long drink, collector, and supper'll be ready almost by the time we drink 'em."

The look of smug happiness on the collector's red face had grown greasy and fixed. He grunted an eager acceptance, and blew clouds of fragrant smoke carelessly in the skipper's face. The good liquor was getting in its work with him.

"*Ach!*" he grunted, relapsing into accent. "It is not many times a man befools we Dutch officials. Nopoddy efer repeats, captain."

"I believe you're right, collector," laughed Saunders quietly. "Really, old chap, I'm beginning to wonder whatever made me think I could get old Carter out of the scrape he got in. Of course, I see now no amount of threatening could shake you folks. What d'ye think of this whisky? Pretty good, hey?"

A shrug was the answer, given with the air of one who was no stranger to good things. The skipper's subtle flattery was having its effect, when Tomba appeared again with a tray of cocktails, announcing that supper would be on the table in a few minutes, and the collector suddenly showed signs of intrest.

"That is good!" he cried, getting up from his chair with a slight stagger. "Before we eat, captain, let us decide that matter of freight first. Then it can be coming on board without loss of time."

Saunders agreed with a curt nod, assuming an indifference he did not feel, and the

collector pointed to the big sampan moored just down the shore.

"Captain, you are discreet," the little man went on, swelling up like a frog of fable before the ox. "Here is a cargo of liquor which I have seized. I prefer not to have it in my district when the commissioner arrives. You will carry it for me to any market you judge proper, and we shall, what you call, split fifty-fifty, yes?"

So quickly that it startled the fat little schemer, Red stuck out a great fist, gripped a pudgy little one until the owner thereof squirmed, and accepted emphatically.

"Done, collector! This is jolly decent of you! Never again will I think myself fit to argue with you people on matters of right and wrong. I intended to bust things up a bit because my silly old mate got locked up; and you not only allow him to be treated kindly, but go and give me a clean sheet and a chance to make a corking good venture. Bring along the goods, man!"

PONDEROUSLY then the collector marched to the rail, barked an order to a loitering native and waited until the crew of the sampan hurried to cast off her lines and pole her down to the *Black Pearl*. Then he remarked in lowered tones:

"You understand, captain, there shall be no papers about this business. Me, I do not wish to appear. You, it will be better that you do not appear, too, as a principal. Joost ship the goods, sell them in the way I know you can, and share the profits with me. Understand?"

"Surely!" replied Saunders in similar tones of caution.

Then aloud with a brilliant smile:

"Better run down and wash up, collector. I'll just see the sampan alongside and work started, and I'll be right with you."

The collector vanished, and the skipper's gray eyes glittered after him.

"Dirty little fat sweep!" he growled softly. "Fat little swab! Old Carter had the right idea. I'll look fine lying here under arrest with a cargo of contraband under hatches when Mr. Commissioner arrives!"

When Tomba announced supper ready a few minutes later the schooner's hatches were off, her holds swarmed with shore natives, and the sampan's big crew was running slings of cases down below as if their lives depended upon getting the *Black Pearl* out of harbor before sunset. The skipper inspected a few slings at first, looked over into the sampan's cargo-well, then joined his guest wearing his sunniest aspect.

That was a number one meal, as the skipper had promised. The collector oozed suave contentment increasingly with each dish, and with each successive rattle of tackles and thud of slings his little blue eyes twinkled more brightly. Before Tomba served his golden liqueurs with fragrant coffee under the awning again the Dutchman beamed with greasy condescension.

He looked around the little ship with the air of a principal creditor entering some palatial home about to come under the hammer, out of which he expected to grab the lion's share of the loot. And the sampan rode high; the schooner's freight was in, when from the ancient fort boomed the sunset gun.

"So you keep up appearances even here?" smiled the skipper. "I might know it, though. Everything I've seen points to official efficiency, sir."

"You are right, captain," smirked the little Dutchman. "The sunset gun is fired, yes, as a matter of routine. As for other efficiency points, there is a gun trained upon your ship at this moment. That's merely routine, too, of course. It isn't likely to be fired at you—unless you transgress the law, yes?"

"And I'm hardly likely to do that," Saunders shrugged resignedly.

The swift darkness fell on the heels of the sun, and the space under the awning was redolent of choice tobacco. Out of a corner of his eye the skipper caught the glint of a musket on the shoulder of a native soldier, who unobtrusively took up his position at the gangway. The village began to twinkle with lights. There was a hum as of many folks going home after a day's toil. Then abruptly from the direction of the jail compound arose a scattering fusillade of shots, cries, and the boom of a great bell.

"*Gott!*" cried the collector, starting to his feet, his blue eyes wide, his attitude one of fear.

Then his native self-esteem came to his rescue, and he strutted to the rail like a fat little, red little turkey cock.

"Listen!" he warned theatrically.

"Sounds like a mutiny, or outbreak of prisoners, or something of the sort," Saunders ventured, standing at the little man's shoulder, towering over him like a lion over

a jackal. "Mighty good thing I'm with you, collector, or you'd think it was some play of mine to get old Carter out."

Shouts continued, and shot after shot rang out. That it was up by the jail was now certain.

"I must go and see!" puffed the little man bravely. "You will pardon me, captain?"

"Oh, don't spoil a good understanding by misreading me now, sir," the skipper protested. "I'm coming with you; and if you want me to bring a couple of my boys along I'll be glad to render any assistance possible. Never know what'll happen in these places where whites hold power by tradition."

The collector was very glad to have such able backing, for his courage quailed at thought of a personal encounter with murderous rebels, whether jailed or free, in the dark. Calling four of his remaining crew, Saunders followed along the shore, and, secure in his ten paces behind the collector, his great body shook with gleeful chuckles. There was certainly plenty of noise going on, whatever the cause or source, when they arrived at length at the jail.

"What's this, what's this?" puffed the collector.

The jail keeper was in the gateway, livid with excitement. His jailers clustered about him, each handling a long rifle as if already assured of its inefficacy against devils.

"Native prisoners broke loose, I think——"

A DEMONIACAL howl rang out down in the darkest corner of the jail compound. Somewhere much nearer the hoarse, angry voice of Tod Carter bawled for a keeper; and right on the heels of the demand the mate himself plunged into the passage, coming from the compound, still carrying in one hand the basin from which he had eaten his supper.

"Hey, y' yeller-bellied *soors!*" he yelled. "Get busy! Yer bloomin' convicts are running wild, and they've killed Billy! My Lawd, skipper!" he blurted, at sight of Saunders. "Are y' going to stand for that, as well as for having me locked up? Don't y' savvee? They've killed poor Billy! My own Billy, what's been my special boy for eight years!"

"By Godfrey!" snapped the skipper. "If that's true— Say, Mr. Collector, if you can't move, let me take a hand! Billy dead?——!"

"Jailer! Place Carter in his cell again for security!" responded the collector, suddenly awakening to life. "Captain, I shall be glad of your help. This is dreadful, with the commissioner due tomorrow! Come with me!"

"I thought he wasn't due for a month," remarked Saunders with a wink at Carter.

The reminder of his untruthfulness passed over the little Dutchman without touching him. He was bursting with mingled anxiety and fear. The skipper seized his mate by the shoulder and urged him toward his cell, for the grim old sailor was making great show of unwillingness.

"Now, Carter, act manly!" he snapped. "This is one time where we have a chance to show a gentleman we can meet him on his own terms. Don't spoil it!"

Carter permitted himself to be locked up again, still holding on to his basin and finishing his meal even before the door clanged to behind him. Following the prison-keeper, the collector waddled into the gloom of the fields, the leader's lantern swinging its wavering yellow light eerily over patches of beetroot and sweet-potato vines.

Next came Saunders, with four of his lithe, happy, brown islanders, whom he had to reprove more than once for unwarranted lightness of heart when Billy was lying dead somewhere in that darkness ahead.

The trouble seemed to have died down. Nowhere about the grounds could any man be seen, or any voice be heard; but the guide knew where the racket had broken out, and unerringly he led the party to the cemetery corner. Then a keen-eyed islander uttered a guttural grunt, darted forward into the blackness, and cried out;

"Massar, bring de lantern, sar! I got Billy, an' he bery dead, sar! Oh, my brudder Billy!"

"What's he doing here?" panted the collector. "He's the man you sent up with Carter's food, isn't he?"

"Yes," returned the skipper shortly. "Perhaps Carter can tell you how he came to be here—killed."

Kneeling down by the fallen seaman, Saunders made a very close examination.

"He's dead, right enough," he stated. "Likely he got killed trying to help your white-livered crew trace that trouble, collector. Here, boys, pick him up. Anywhere we can lay him out, sir, while I send

down to the ship for his coffin? All my boys carry their own coffins, y' know."

With the cessation of noise and the presence of many men, the collector got back something of his greasy pomposity. His red face shone in the lantern light, and there was a trace of contempt in his tone when he answered:

"Yes, yes, lay the man out in the toolshed, if you want to make so much fuss about a nigger. Bury him here, too, if you want to. I'll see that things are really quiet, and join you in a quarter of an hour or so. Here, jailer," he called to a very relieved native, "turn out a couple of laborers and make them dig a grave in the corner here for Captain Saunders' Billy."

With a cheerful lack of solemnity the *Black Pearl's* boys went about their task; and by the time the collector returned to report his inability to discover anything unusual about the grounds and fields, and to state with growing confidence his belief that the whole thing was a piece of tomfoolery on somebody's part, Billy's coffin arrived from the schooner to prove that it was no foolery for Billy anyhow.

"I'll get to the bottom of it, nefer fear, tomorrow," the little fat man announced importantly. "If I hadn't been with you all the time, Saunders, and had not seen your man Carter in his cell with my own eyes since this happened, I'd think you had pulled off one of the gaudy tricks I've heard you're so clever at. As it is, let it rest until daylight. The hole's dug, if you really mean to bury that nigger in style."

"Just a matter of sentiment, collector. Sentiment goes a long way with these chaps," returned Saunders softly. "But I'm glad you exonerate me from trickery. I'd hate to be caught pulling anything so crude on you, sir."

Beckoning to his boys, the skipper followed the lantern bearer down to the little cemetery by the northern fence, and Billy's shipmates bore his coffin tenderly on their naked, brawny shoulders. At the grave they set down their burden, and the skipper coughed apologetically.

"Do you mind saying a bit o' service, sir?" he asked the collector. "I'm not much of a hand at that sort of thing."

"Nonsense!" blustered the little fat man testily. "What do I know about services for dead niggers? Bury him and be done with it. He don't know anything about it anyhow."

"Well, perhaps not," replied the skipper hesitatingly. "But these fellows have been with me for many years, and they look upon me as their father and old Tod Carter as their uncle. Er—don't think I'm taking advantage, collector, but if you'd add to your other kindnesses and let Carter out just for this funeral, he'd read off a bit o' prayer for Billy, and the boys here'd feel that their shipmate was launched properly. Billy was the mate's own boy, y' know."

THE collector at that instant had rosy thoughts of great honor coming to him when his superior arrived and found the noted Red Saunders held up with a schooner full of illicit liquor and his mate in jail. With all the prison staff around him, and the big skipper and his four boys unarmed, there certainly appeared no reason why this last request should not be granted. And Red really had given him a gorgeous feed; the long, insidious whisky swizzles concocted by Tomba put a warm glow into a man's veins.

"Oh, well, just as you wish," he said with a shrug. "I'll wait for you in the office in front. Bring Carter out here, jailer."

Tod Carter stood beside Billy's coffin, staring inquiringly at the skipper.

"Go ahead, man, say something!" grinned Saunders, and trod sharply on the bare toes of one of his boys, who, before Carter even grasped the meaning of "say something," uttered a yell that pierced the skies. And as if waiting for that yell, out of the blackness of the fields opposite crackled a dozen pistol-shots in a rapid fusillade, and the prison area resounded with howls and shrieks as of souls in torment.

In the hubbub Saunders leaned over and spoke a few crisp sentences in Carter's ready ear; then as jailers and convict guards sprang toward the scene of the uproar, and the collector came running from the jail, there was a confused huddle of figures around Billy's coffin, with the skipper interposing his great bulk between the grave and the jail. When the official came puffing up the jailers had vanished, the fields looked like a black lake in which bobbed the single flickering dot of the lantern now far away, and the *Black Pearl's* four seamen were hoisting Billy's coffin on

to their shoulders again, facing toward the jail gates.

"Whatever is the matter again?" panted the collector, his round little paunch visibly shaking even in the vague light.

"Lord knows," returned Saunders sharply, "except that there's more trouble with your confounded jailbirds, it seems, and my boys refuse to let Billy's body stay here——"

"No, sar! We no let Billy lib fo' bury in dis place!" cried one of the bearers. "Too much debbil, too much plenty noise he make fo' mans to stay buried. Bimeby dead mans walk, wid all dis hullabaloo. No, sar! We take Billy an' bury he in de big water!"

"Oh, get out then!" cried the little fat man wearily.

The bearers started on their funeral march with bowed heads.

"Anything I can do now?" queried Saunders, less genially than he had spoken before.

"No! I want every stranger outside! I'll lock the gates, call the muster and search every yard of this compound and get to the bottom of all this bother. Better get aboard your ship, Saunders, and stay there. I have a guard at the gangway. Understand, you remain at the dock until you're cleared in the morning. I'll know all about this by then."

THE sentry standing guard over the *Black Pearl* grinned as the funeral procession passed him on the gangway. He was still grinning when a hand like a steel claw twisted his gun out of his hands and tossed it into the dancing water alongside; and the grin was effectually removed by another hand, a fellow to the first, which covered his face and gently but firmly drew him on board the schooner. Bonga Bob was there already.

"Shove him into the chain-locker, Bob!" snapped the skipper. "Then get your shore-lines singled up. Loose the canvas and stand by. The boys ought to be here any minute now; and the collector won't be far behind."

Wearing a smile as sunny as day itself, Red passed along to the galley and tapped at the closed window, behind which a dim light glowed.

"Hey, Billy!" he called softly. "Are you there? Open up."

THE window opened a crack, and in it appeared Billy's smiling face, still smudged with traces of paint which he was trying vigorously to towel off, but looking very unlike a dead man.

"Good work, Billy!" the skipper smiled. "Get out as soon as you can and stand by. Tell the carpenter I'll make him a present that'll please that chubby little wench of his back home, for the good job he made of that coffin. Hinges and bolts in alongside make a dandy door for a dead man to rise from the dead through."

Billy had marched out of jail with the bearers.

From the galley Saunders went to the coffin, lying on the hatch, and the drawing of a bolt at each end resulted in the side of the long box falling down flat; and there emerged Tod Carter, grumbling as ever, but grinning too, to go without delay to his post on the forecastle ready for pulling out.

One by one the crew who had been given shore leave crept on board, and every man wore a golden smile of sheer happiness in appreciation of the hilarious two hours they had just passed making night hideous around the fences of the prison compound.

Then, audible before he was visible, down came the fat little collector, puffing furiously, mad as a hornet, and he seemed mightily surprized to find the schooner still there.

"By golly, Saunders, I don't know what to make of you yet!" he began. "I expected to find you trying to sail away. That mate of yours is missing! Come now, what's it all mean?"

Silently, inexorably, Red took the little fat man up in his great arms, his fingers pinching plump flesh pitilessly. And his whistle shrilled out, the lines began to slip on board, and the windlass started yanking in the anchor-chain. Saunders bore his kicking, squealing captive over to the hatch.

"Here, Billy!" he called softly; and Billy appeared.

"Collector, this is the dead come to life again. My boys told you there was too much noise for a dead man to stay dead. Billy, lad, slip down the chain-locker and bring up the sentry."

"By golly, you can't get away with this!" screamed the little fat man. "Those guns——"

"Sure," smiled Saunders, giving him a painful pinch. "I remembered the guns in the fort. There!"

A gun roared at that instant, and a round-shot tore between the schooner's masts and plunged into the night-clad sea fair in the mouth of the bay.

"Hurry, Billy!" the skipper roared, anxious now. "Get sail on her, Carter! Bring in that cable handily, boys! Jump, confound you! Want us to get blown out of the water, now we've won?"

The collector was like a jelly with fear now that his own guns would sink and drown him; but his hopes were as strong that Saunders must stay. To dissipate his hopes came Billy, leading a forlorn native sentry by the ear.

"Billy, go for'ard and lend a hand!" snapped Red.

Turning to the collector, he seized the sentry by the neck and waist.

"Tell him what message you want to send to those gunners!" the skipper hissed savagely. "Hustle! I'll sail for all your guns, now I have my mate; and you I'll lash to the mainmast until we drop the land. So tell the gunners to quit firing. Here goes the messenger—one—two—three——"

The terrified sentry was hurled into the water not ten fathoms from shore, and as he got his head above water he heard the collector's frenzied command to run every step of the way to the fort and stop the shooting.

"Now you needn't feel scared, little fat swine," Saunders told his unwilling guest as the schooner drew away from the shore and caught the brisk night breeze blowing fair through the horns of the bay. "I don't eat fat little men, I only put 'em in their places. As soon as we're out of range of your old fort, I'll put you in a row boat. That'll give you exercise enough to make you look healthy when the commissioner arrives. You deserve that punishment for trying to steal my old mate. Shame on you, little one, to try to steal my mate!"

As soon as the schooner had sunk the land almost out of sight a small boat was dropped over and the collector was put in it and headed shoreward.

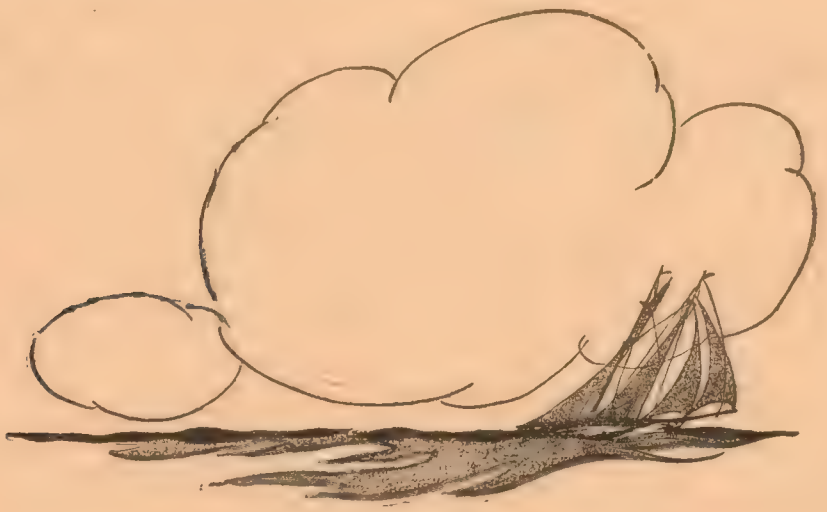
"Good-by, old chap," the skipper called cheerily. "Next time you hear of me and feel like matching wits with me, don't omit to catch me and secure me before you tackle any of my men."

"I'll have you hung yet!" squealed the furious little man, struggling frantically with unaccustomed oars, and sweating at the prospect of that terrible pull home. "I'll send the gunboat after you——"

"Don't bother, old top," laughed Red happily. "No papers, you know; this cargo of wet goods is better without papers—just between you and me, don't you know. I'm outside the three-mile limit now, little man. Go home before it rains!"

And, turning happily to old Tod Carter, the chuckling skipper remarked:

"Wasn't it Thursday Island I thought we'd try this trip? As good as any place, isn't it? Then let's go."



# THE DROUGHT

## by BARRY SCOBEE

*Author of "Gold of the Never Never," "The Wind," etc.*

NO RAIN had fallen for eleven months. The boulders of the mountains were covered with dust. Dust lay thick upon the small stones underfoot. And dust fogged up at every shifting of the restless hoofs.

For two days the big rangy cow with the Arrowhead brand across her left side had stood and bawled and peered and sniffed at a moist spot under the edge of the rim rock. The spring had been her drinking-place for a year, but now it was dry. The bottom already was cracked into mosaic by the sun.

The Hereford had been without water three days. Her bones protruded and she looked dried up.

And now this morning three coyotes, their instinct prophesying fresh beef, had come and sat down around her, to wait and watch for the opportune time to drive in to the kill.

Jack-rabbits and other game had long since left this drought-burned region. Vague reports said they had gone to the New Mexico mountains. Also the cattle, among which the preying brutes could have slain calves readily, had been driven from this Big Bend region of Texas largely, headed for greener pasture.

Thus it was that hunger pinched the bellies of the three gaunt and bony wolves that slavered and watched and whimpered.

Tentatively one of them sidled up to the cow's heels and snapped. It was a half-hearted trial at hamstringing her—a tryout without great expectations.

The cow's instincts were keen. Watchful from the moment when the trio trotted up, she was alert to step aside and fling around with her short but wide-spread horns low in action. The other two coyotes half-rose from their squatting posture as the one jumped in, but as he missed they sat down again. This readiness was but a promise of what their teamwork could be.

With that tentative snapping, the fight for meat, the battle of self-defense, was on in the choking dust.

It was the racial hunger-hope of the wolves to get their jaws clamped on the great tendon just above the cow's hock. When once in these flying leaps a strong tooth-hold should be gained, the weight of the leaping body would snap the cord in two, or tear it from its bony anchorage. With one leg useless the cow would be quick prey to sharp fangs.

A year before, when the grass was short on the lower ranges, the Arrowhead milcher had by chance wandered into the foothills, then the altitudes, searching for pasturage. In the snug little cañons of the peaks, a mile or even more above the level of the distant salty seas, she found it. Often she grazed near the deer on the flat tops of the peaks, where there were sunken holes in the rock filled with sweet water. But ever the spring under the rim was her going-back place.

Now the November winds of the great drought had finally licked up Nature's wine. In the first day she had stood by the

dry pool stolidly, bawling now and then in a mournful way. The second day she had been more restless, bawling impatiently, browsing a mouthful of dry grass now and then, plunging at a deer venturing near for water. And in the night of the third twenty-four hours she had turned away from the hole and inhaled long drafts of the brisk breeze from the south. It was scented with water—a delicate fragrance picked up somewhere below, at a spring or on the Rio Grande.

She had been tempted, yet had lacked propulsion which was supplied by the arrival of the coyotes.

Impelled by hunger, the coyotes did not hesitate to push the fight. Bawling angrily and shaking her head, the cow kept turning about to fend off an attack. The wolves were cautious, for though the white-face appeared clumsy she was quick.

It was her first predicament with the coyotes, but she knew the meaning. The battle had been going on since before man domesticated her ancestors. And the coyotes in turn knew she was nearing the end of her tether or they would never have wasted time with a grown cow.

Abruptly the cow broke and ran, as if from flies, stirring up a cloud of dust. She ran a little way out on the shelf, and paused there to inhale deeply again of that south breeze.

She realized by the same sort of instinct that told the coyotes to cling at her heels that she must have water quickly or her strength would go. And the bony hunters knew that if they clung to the trail of a thirsty cow long enough they would dine.

The cow stretched her neck and bawled long and low and plaintively, and started southward at a trot. The three hunters fell in at her heels.

BUD MILROY counted with the thumb and fingers of his grimy right hand as he broiled bacon on a stick with his left.

"This is Friday. One, two—by Joe! Five days since I started. Not a square meal. Not a square sleep."

He shivered in the acidy wind of sunrise.

"Ugh, it's cold up here!"

He was above the world, in the highest altitudes of the Chisos Range. The sun painted the earth-floor thousands of feet

below and miles away with crimson gold that Bud could see for a hundred miles or more to the south and west.

In the dry and crystal air there was not a single habitation of man visible. Off to the southward somewhere serpentined the Rio Grande. Hills and peaks intervened so that it could not be seen, however.

As the bacon sizzled, the man, with his steely blue eyes, kept scanning the nearer rocks and ridges.

"Five days," he repeated. "By Joe, they'll be coming to look for me purty soon."

He had in mind his fellow-rangers. The previous Sunday afternoon the sergeant of the service at Marpine had sent three of his men out to arrest a half-breed Mexican called Nutmeg, reported by telephone to be rustling cattle on the Alamito.

All at once the fifty per cent. Mexican—it was gossiped along the river that the other half of him was laundry Chinese—became a much surrounded rustler. He managed to squirt out of the pinch. But Milroy was hot on his heels. He led straight to the Chisos, Bud getting close enough only now and then to let loose a thirty-thirty steel jacket, or to have ditto fired at him.

Bud propped his chunk of fat bacon over the little cedar-stick fire, kept low purposely so as not to attract attention, and rose to see better into a tremendous niche below, still dark in the shadows. A flicker of fire, a silhouette of horse and rider on the rims, would give him the clue he wanted to his man's whereabouts.

But the world was empty, save for an eagle floating high above the peaks, flashing golden in the sun.

Yet Nutmeg was around somewhere, or had been at sunset. For then they had exchanged leaden compliments.

Bud and his horse were on a shelf that here widened into a park as large as would be needed for a dozen horses. Ten feet from the fire the edge of the shelf became the rim of the tremendous niche—a great, crater-like cup in the mountains floored with boulders three hundred feet below. The sides sloped off steeply and slick as glass. The far side looked straight up and down, but it showed a crack where water must have escaped in rainy seasons.

"By Joe," went the wonder in Bud's mind, "how in thunder did we ever get up here anyhow? Horse, I doubt if I can get you down again."

He squatted at the fire and began to nibble at the bacon. It was his last food. His canteen was all but empty. No use man-hunting any longer. The thing to do was to get out of this trap.

"By Joe, horse," he said, half to hear his own voice in the stillness, "I'm better off than you, at that. You haven't had a drink since yesterday afternoon, and there wasn't much juice left in that last rain-hole either. I wonder where that Nutmeg is anyhow?"

"Right here!"

Bud dived for his guns, landing short by a foot, flat on his stomach.

"Hands off!"

Milroy reluctantly drew back and faced the unexpected guest. Nutmeg, leading a horse with the bridle-rein in the crook of his elbow, stood there grinning, rifle ready.

"I smelled your bacon," he said.

"You'd be sorry by now that your nose was so sharp," Bud returned, "if I hadn't been fool enough to leave my guns just out of reach. First time I ever done that."

"The best of us slip now and then on a mango-seed, eh?" Nutmeg sympathized mockingly.

The Mexican came forward, half-dragging the fagged horse behind him. He picked up Bud's old-time pearl-handled six-shooter, examined it, and rammed it down in his empty scabbard.

"Pardon me; I crave you," he said.

Bud had heard the man was wickedly polite in the way a Mexican dandy can be when he wishes to be.

Nutmeg next examined the thirty-thirty briefly and broke it over a rock, and struck a second blow to bend the barrel slightly. As a last act with these possessions he took all of Bud's ammunition from a belt and flung the belt over the rock rim on to the glassy slope. Of its own accord it slid several yards before catching and holding.

"Excuse," pleaded the mocker. "I am so sorry to injure you."

Not to be outdone in manners by a Mexican who was half-laundry Chink, Bud uncovered an impulsive and genuine grin and held up his bacon on the stick.

"Have some."

Nutmeg slipped off all of it, the whole crisp chunk, not five good bites at that.

"*Pelado* manners!" charged Bud.

The man's black eyes flamed. He flung

the piece of bacon into Bud's face. Mortal offense had been given.

"You—you—" stuttered Nutmeg. "I'll kill you!"

He upped with the gun and Bud heard the lock *tiklik*.

"You can, Mex," said the ranger coldly. "But if you do, John Black, and Mixy, and the sergeant, and King, and all the rest of the boys will make you look like a mouse in a cattery."

The Mexican part of him said shoot. The Chinese half counseled wisdom and patience, and won. The rifle went down. Visibly the wrath faded out of his face. He looked Milroy over.

"Ah," said he presently, "I have overlook' something, *señor*. Take off your boots."

The Mexican sat down on a rock and jerked off his own boots, which were knocked to pieces. He snapped his fingers impatiently at Bud; and Bud, knowing that to hesitate would do no particular good, passed his boots over, while a vague horror went over him. What if he should be set afoot without boots in this country of rocks and cactus?

Nutmeg inserted his sockless feet inquiringly into the pair. He stood up and stamped about.

"Perfect!" he exclaimed. "Perfect as a woman!"

He looked Bud and his remaining possessions over. He took Bud's canteen and drank heartily, and poured what remained into his own canteen; then he smashed Milroy's container.

"Water is few and far between," he commented. "I am going to be ver' fine to you," he went on. "You saddle and mount and I will let you ride back to your ranger friends at Marpine. You will tell them Nutmeg has your boots, eh? And they will perceive the honor. They will give you the horse laugh, eh? Haw-haw-haw!"

When Bud had saddled and mounted, the Mexican led the weary bay to the brink of the great cavity and paused. He handed up the reins.

"A pleasant journey," he wished.

"There'll be a pleasanter one, Mex, when I drive you in to jail some time."

Nutmeg chuckled. He bent and pretended to whisper into one of the ears of the drooping horse, but he was highly facetious and said aloud—

"Your master jokes!'

Then with a sudden bracing of his legs, as murder flashed in his eyes, he leaned against the horse and pushed. Swung off its balance, the horse stepped sidewise, over the brink, on to the glassy slide.

The animal shot downward. Bud threw himself out of the saddle. He landed, clutching at the rough stone of the edge. He caught, but the half-breed kicked his fingers, and he went sliding after the horse.

"Bullets leave holes," called the cattle-rustler. "But bones broken against the rocks is an accident."

THE Chisos Mountains—called the Ghost Mountains by some—are black and barren and empty. It is probable no other part of the United States can offer a spectacle so desolate and little known. They seem to be the oldest part of the world. They are the crumbling ruins of mountains, and doubt stirs about that old phrase, the "everlasting hills" of geology.

Old-time cattle men, the few that ever ventured into the mountains, found ancient trails worn yards wide and inches deep on the rock slopes and in the passes. "Indian trails" they called them. And if such they are they must have been made through centuries of travel by moccasined bronze races even before the days when the Anglo-Saxon stream was sweeping westward.

There are bat caves in these black rocks where the guano is three feet deep; yet no man, so the guano-diggers say, has seen a bat in the region since written history began.

Perhaps the Toboso Indians of long ago, and the Comanche horsemen in more modern times, learned the natural paths and *tenajas* of the lonely heights, but few white men have explored for them.

Water-holes? Trails out? Bud Milroy knew nothing of them. He was unaware of the distance to the Rio Grande. He had won to the upper reaches by daring and not by knowledge.

So now, at sunset of this day of Nutmeg's trick, Bud rested on the northern lip of the vast cup, parched by thirst, wondering which way to turn.

The body of the horse, his saddle, lay at the bottom of the cup. All day long had he spent inching up the slope, sliding back, falling, hanging on by his nails, or sometimes mostly by hope.

"Old Nutmeg thought my bones would be

found down there without bullet marks," he thought triumphantly. "Well——"

As the sun went down the moon see-sawed up on the other side of the world, cold and polished bright. And a wind scoured the unsheltered places.

Bud wore a light coat of soft material. In keeping with a plan he had worked out, he split it and wrapped the halves about his feet, tying them with strips torn from the sleeves. This finished, he struck out northwest.

"Hit a road or ranch sooner or later," he thought.

He was not acquainted with the immediate region of this clump of mountains even, his picket-line having been more in the Sierra Blanca country.

It was hard going. The thickness of cloth lacked a great deal being thick leather soles under his feet. Stepping on sharp stones that punched into the tender flesh, as he frequently did, he was kept busy trying to favor his feet. The wads of coat made walking clumsy, and sometimes he fell, always rising a little the worse because of bumps and bruises. Too, the moonlight cast shadow traps of all sorts.

He could not keep a strict northwest course. He was forever turning this way and that. In no time the cloth on his feet was in shreds, and rocks were gouging into the bare flesh.

Bud began to balance in an effort to keep off this foot or that as arch, heel or toes went upon jagged stones. His shadow showed him a grotesque dance there in the night.

In desperation he removed his shirt, and, halving it, wrapped the rags of the coat in the pieces and tied the pads on. Walking was clumsier than ever.

By an hour he estimated to be considerably short of midnight, his feet were on the ground. He could have been trailed in daytime by odd spoor—buttons and bits of cloth. And he was doing the cautious ropewalk for a fact.

Then Nature played her hand from a new angle. The stiff breeze from the south laid abruptly. There was not a sound. Bud sat down on a rock to listen. The sky was so clear and cold it seemed to him he could hear the stars crackle.

Off on a crag against the moon-glow a coyote opened his throat and spilled more noise than a pack of boys just let out of school. From below came the faint spitting of two bobcats, fighting perhaps over an upland quail.

From afar off came the howl of a great wolf—a tawny, hungry lobo somewhere.

Bud knew the signs. Reluctantly he faced northward. A black cloud stretched across, stalking like a giant over the world—the coming of a Texas norther.

First there came the faintest fanning of the air, cold, colder even than the acid biting of the mountain atmosphere. In a moment the wind broke, shrieking, roaring, beating at the rocks like a mighty tide.

The cloud spread over the sky. Bud hoped it would turn to snow, for that would mean moisture in his parched throat. Up here among the peaks the wind blew more fiercely than he had ever known wind to blow.

Travel in darkness, with bare feet, in this icy gale, was impossible. Bud found something of a shelter under a cliff. There he searched out a gnarled cedar in a crack of the rock. It had been so obedient for the years of its life to the pounding of the winds that it lay flat upon the rock. By the light of day one would have seen that it looked as barkless and gray as the unpainted weather-beaten boards of an old barn. Bud broke off the dry parts and lighted a tiny fire to huddle over.

He was mauled by the cold and the drought. He shivered like a cold dog, and, without water since morning, his mouth and throat were dry to scaliness. It was the worst night he ever put in.

At daybreak he was up and going, hungry, thirsty, more naked than clothed, like the hunters of the ancient caves. Grimly he made his way, doing the grotesque Dance of Bare Feet on Rocks.

Bud had an old trick that he used under adverse circumstances, and he used it now for all it was worth—he would not permit his thoughts to dwell on the troubles at hand. He drove his consciousness to other things—his hopes, and other cases, and people. Oftenest now he remembered Nutmeg.

Full daylight showed that the clouds had thinned, dispelling hope for snow.

It was yet early in the day when Milroy made his way on hands and knees up to a height of jumbled rock that would give him the first uninterrupted survey of the country since sunrise the previous morning.

Empty foothills and bad-lands and range

country to the south and west, empty save for fleeting dust fantoms—ragged clouds jerked up here by the wind and disappearing there. A world of cold and dry desolation.

Bud scanned this dusty land for a tracery of green that would mark a spring, or the Rio Grande. He could make out neither. He drew his gaze in closer, to the great shelf immediately below the rim where he lay stretched on his stomach—and suddenly hugged down close to conceal himself.

For down below three coyotes and a big rangy white-face cow were putting up a desperate fight.

Bud watched. The four stirred up mighty dust-clouds, which the wind swept aside constantly, disclosing the combatants.

The coyotes surrounded the cow in triangle shape. First one then another leaped in at the hocks. Now and then one ventured to snap jaws at the throat—anything to worry the cow down to their strength.

It was an old and hated picture to the ranger, who had been reared in the branding pin and taught his A-B-C's from the brands on cattle and other stock. His hands itched for the rifle that lay back on the mountain shelf worthless.

"I'm half notioned to go down and stone 'em off," he thought, his heart going out to the plucky veteran of the range.

He studied the situation, deducing by leaps and bounds as only a cow-ranch-born man can. The cow had strayed from her range to the mountains. The drought was driving her out now to hunt grass and water. The wolves had been at her for some time. Maybe she had lain down to rest, and the brutes had taken it for granted that their meal was ready.

"The empty-bellies missed their bet, I'll say," Bud decided. "That cow's as good as a straight flush right now."

His slitted eyes went wind-tender and flooded with moisture, which the gale flung out across one cheek. When he had them cleared again the fight appeared to have reached its climax, judging by the gray dust that was being kicked up. Nothing could be seen of the combatants, until a tawny body shot out of the mêlée, tumbling heels over head.

The wind whisked the curtain aside. At the same instant the two coyotes attacked at her heels. In an instant the Hereford turned. In leaping back one coyote fell over the other. The cow scooped it up on her horns, and it fell rolling off to one side.

The coyotes gave back, whipped for the time. The white-face stamped around, bawling angrily and shaking her head.

Two of the wolves ran ahead a short stone's throw and lay down, some little distance apart. The third one remained behind the cow.

The Hereford stood for a little while spraddle-legged, resting. Bud rested and watched, curious to see what next. Presently she started off southward. She stretched her skinny neck and bawled the anxious cow-cry for water. Bud's face lighted.

"By Joe, she's headin' for water! Cow, I'm going to drink with you!"

The pair of coyotes ahead rose and trotted along abreast of the white-face, the third bringing up the rear.

Bud crawled over the rim and started a winding way down to the mesa.

COYOTES are slick, cunning as the serpent that knows how to avoid man. More than one sheep-herder and cattle hand has decided that the slinking-hipped little "yaller devil" is gifted with human knowledge.

The coyote seems to be almost the one wild animal that roved the plains with the savage Indians that yet thrives in the face of civilization. Ordinary wild coyotes have been seen sniffling city odors at the very edge of San Antonio. And in the Spring of 1921 trappers cashed coyote scalps for bounty in a northwest county of the United States, where coyotes were not seen a few years ago.

From the Peace Arch to Point Isabel they are slick. Any one who hunts after them much with a gun will bet his bottom dollar they can tell a gun a mile away. Maybe they smell the odor of burned powder.

The three cold-eyed chips of Wrong fled when they beheld Bud doing a grotesque contortion dance on the mesa, where there was a sort of shaly rock that pressed into his soles almost unbearably. The animals laid to the ground and made haste. When they had put good shooting distance between their greatest enemy and themselves they paused to look back, heads cocked inquiringly.

When no bullets whined, they lay down to watch. No powder smell—it may have been that—registering on their scent tissues, they began to work back gradually. Undoubtedly they realized that something ailed the man as well as the cow, something that took away his strength and his sting. The coyote is as uncanny about that, it has seemed to more than one traveler, as the buzzard. A buzzard battled with the wind now, high above the man and the cow.

The white-face was making pretty heavy time of it. Evidently the last set-to had wearied her terribly. She kept stopping to rest, bracing herself with spraddled legs. When Bud got near he made out the Arrowhead brand.

"Hello!" was his surprized thought. "Bossie, I've eat at your house. Reckon maybe I've drunk your milk. Bet old J. J's looked for you."

Bud's comradely feeling for the cow jumped ahead several notches. That she should be an old friend, so to speak, as well as being his guide to water, multipied his determination to see her through. He had to be alert every instant to keep thoughts of his flaming thirst out of mind.

Gradually the Hereford regained her wind, which enabled her to make better time than Bud, whose feet were cut by the sharp stones, and bleeding freely. He was thankful there was no cactus, catclaw or ocatilla here.

Memory kept recalling to him an occasion when he and another ranger, in swimming at the lower end of the Grand Cañon of the Rio Grande, had attempted to wade the river but had been compelled to give up because of the agony caused by the stones pressing into their bare feet. This was immeasurably worse.

As the cow got away from him the dread came that she might get clear away. Following the trail would be impossible, for the blowing dust blotted out the few signs.

Then he discovered that the coyotes were working in close to her again, and eventually, by nagging, they retarded her until he approached anew. The coyotes withdrew, but not far.

This process was repeated time after time. The cow could not travel unbothered unless he was near.

Steadily the wolves lost their fear of the man. By mid-forenoon they tacitly accepted him and included him in their game.

The Arrowhead milcher soon learned to time her pace to Bud's. One wolf got to following behind Bud. The other two kept their positions abreast of the cow and a few yards to either side. This disposal of force was not constant, but it obviously was the general instinctive plan of the pack.

A terrible hunger had hold of the wolves. Bud had never seen such starved creatures. At every faltering of the cow or of himself the brutes would whimper hungrily and eagerly. Once when the cow tried to lick her muzzle with her dry tongue a coyote leaped in at it. Men who know the shyness of coyotes would have understood that the beasts were utterly desperate to remain so close in the neighborhood of a man.

Sometimes fear turned Bud panicky, but he shut it out as quickly as he could veer his mind around to something else. Yet he was convinced that coyotes know, and that buzzards know, when a feast is in the pot. And the coyotes clung on like a late Spring, and the brown bird battled with the wind above him.

Bud had called the buzzards the sentinels of the Big Bend, for it seemed he never scanned the blue but that the birds were visible high, high up, carcass-watching.

"To —— with 'em," he swore in silence. "They've got to ride the wind down closer than that to put yellow in my blood."

Bud refrained from opening his mouth to shout at the wolves or to breathe. His mouth was dry enough without inhaling dust.

The wind whipped the parade eventually to the edge of the dusty mesa, and as they neared the drop-off the cow endeavored to make swifter headway, but was retarded by the wolves. At the brink, however, she bawled madly and broke into a run down a long rocky slope.

The coyotes bunched after her. One made a flying leap at her tail. Milroy recognized this ancient ju-jutsu of the wolves. They meant to jerk her off her feet as she galloped—an easy thing to do.

Every bull-prodder worthy of the name, from the short-grass country to the rolling range of Alberta, has observed the trick. Every time they see a bob-tailed calf they have a vision of a frosty morning, a galloping yearling and a wolf trying to seize the tail and jump sidewise to throw the calf off his feet. The calf under such circumstances will hit the ground and be up again, but in

that half-instant the wolf often has time to snap the hamstring. Sometimes they get only a piece of the tail. Wolves are slick!

All at once Bud realized what the mad down-hill race meant—the cow was close to the water-hole!

He forgot his feet. He only wanted a drink. He joined in the race, leaping in ten-foot strides.

When the ranger caught up, the white-face was standing by a clump of rock in the midst of many tracks licking at the moist earth in the bottom of a swag where a living *tenaja* had just gone dry. But he saw it was too dry for her to have found water.

He went to his knees. He sat down. His toes felt broken from the leaping strides, his soles were soaked with fresh blood. Under the right arch a long gash was cut. He pressed moist earth into it from the bottom of the spring to quench the blood flow.

The coyotes sat around, cold-eyed, curiously alert, hungrily wiping their jaws with their long red tongues. He was weary, stupid. He kept looking at the wolves. There was something curious about them.

Then he saw there were four! The fourth one was a lobo. He must have been at the dry hole when the others arrived. Like as not he was the fellow that had howled the night before.

This arrival complicated matters. A hungry lobo is strong and bold. And this lobo was hungry, if protruding bones told the truth.

Bud lay back supine. He was so weary that even the cold was forgotten for a second. But no sooner did his eyes close than there was an unmistakable sniffle in his ear, and he sat up to face the unafraid lobo. It gave back reluctantly, snarling.

Bud forced himself up. The cow lay down at the same instant, exhausted. He tried to get her up. She refused to budge.

He took hold of a horn, an act that will often get a cow to bestir herself. She shook her head and lay tight.

He took a stone the size of his fist and began to peck her on one shin. She got up then, by his helping to "tail" her. That is, he seized her tail and helped her to rise, as the ranchmen had been doing for months with their drought-weakened cows.

And grimly he drove her on with never a thought of stopping or turning back or giving up what he had started out to do.

THE wind bit to the very inwardness of Milroy. It numbed him. The unholy trio of lacerated feet, thirst and cold put him up against it, and he realized the fact fully. But he tried, and with considerable success, to do that thing which had carried him through more than one pinch—to keep his mind cleared of thoughts of disaster and fear.

The wind never slacked. It poured out of the north like a river. It was, or had been, a blizzard in the Dakotas. In Texas it was a norther that set herds to drifting and kept men humping over sheet-iron stoves or open fires from the Staked Plains to the wastes of the Coahuilan desert, and possibly to the City of Mexico.

This river of atmosphere helped them in their southward drift. It kept the hair of the cow and of the wolves roached up in windrows, and often made them stumble. It kept the torn ribbons of Bud's trousers, and his hair—the wind had long since filched his hat—blowing out ahead. His rags seemed to pull him on.

It was dry beyond belief. Every step stirred up a spurt of dust that the wind whisked into the battle-clouds rolling here and there. It turned off clear, a wholly dry norther, but there was no spark of warmth in the sun for his half-naked body.

The week before Bud had watched Mexicans digging a cellar for a ranchman. At six feet the earth was as dry as hot ashes. All moisture seemed dried up.

By mid-afternoon the cow was making pauses now and then to rest. But Milroy, wanting water as a hunted deer wants it, drove her onward.

Bud sent his memory everywhere to keep it off of water. And by perverse chance he remembered that once when on a trip to San Antonio, stopping at a fine hotel, he had washed his hands and face in a marble basin in a corner of his room.

That basin half-filled with water got hold of his imagination. Just to have that much now, just what a man uses in the city to wash in before breakfast!

So deep was Bud in this mental fight to keep his thought from water that he did not see the wolves disappear, and it was with surprize that he noted they were no longer at hand. Well, no difference. Their

going could not help much, nor could their staying have hindered.

Perhaps they had gone on to water! He brightened at that, and surveyed the rocky mountainside they were traversing. No; evidently they had not gone to water, for there was the lobo three or four hundred yards to the right, standing and looking back. Suddenly the beast sprang into the air, and in a split second a shot sounded. Dust *flupped* up, and the wolf fled.

Then Bud saw, straight ahead, a man on a horse. He was partly to the leeward of a big boulder out of the wind.

Bud was electrified. Water! He started forward, checked himself. For the sake of the ranger service he must not act a fool. He kept himself behind the cow until he reached the man.

Ten feet away he saw that the horseman was Nutmeg.

The man was incredibly dirty—dust wind-beaten into his face and ears and hair. And for the first time it occurred to Bud how he himself must look. The half-breed stared, then started in recognition.

"The ——!" he exclaimed.

Bud's hands shot out toward the canteen hanging on the saddle-horn.

"A drink, *señor!*" he croaked.

Nutmeg whisked the canteen over to the other side, out of reach. He put the flat of his boot—Bud's boot!—against Bud's face and pushed. Bud staggered, caught himself, started forward, the killing instinct uppermost.

Nutmeg lifted out his gun in a single motion.

"Stay back!"

Bud checked himself.

The Mexican's tension slacked. He hooked one knee over the saddle and grinned down at Bud grimly.

"So," said he, "we meet."

"Well."

"I am surprize'. I theenk you are in the big hole up there. My horse get away," he added. "I am delay' until I catch him. But now I am sufficiently rewarded. No?"

"Why?"

Nutmeg made a significant gesture with the revolver.

"No you won't!"

"No?"

"Because if you did you'd be afraid all the rangers in the Big Bend would trail you to the frazzled end of your tether—to Mexico City if they had to, to get you."

"They've been trailing me a year," sneered the rider.

"Playin' with yuh!"

Nutmeg changed his tactics.

"You shut up your beeg mouth, ranger. I desire to theenk."

"Yeah, that's right. Think twice."

Bud hardly knew whether he was making sounds or not, with his dry, numb and enlarged tongue. His throat seemed on fire.

The half-breed slid to the ground. He got behind the boulder out of the wind and lighted a shuck cigaret with a match from a little box.

Bud noted now that the slant-eyed face was weary and pinched. The horse was all but used up. It stood slant-legged, nose almost drooping to the ground, the rifle in the saddle-boot seeming to weigh it down. Then Bud changed his position to see the canteen, and saw that the cork had dropped out. He reached out and gave the container a jerk. It was empty!

The Mexican laughed. He began to throw the pearl-handled six-shooter—Bud's pet—and catch it by the barrel, at the same time regarding Milroy thoughtfully.

Abruptly he paused. He looked at the wolves slinking off beyond easy shot; he looked at Bud, at the cow, at the buzzard above. He flung down his cigaret and heeled it into the dust. He lifted himself on to the back of the weary horse and headed it to the southwest, ready to spur and start.

"Ranger," said he, "*you* will never hunt me again. *Adios!* I leave you to the—" he looked at the dusty world and the waiting wolves—"to the—Drought!"

THE Drought!

The Mexican's conclusion seemed like a sentence by a judge.

"He thinks the Drought will get me, thinks I'm done for!"

All at once, to him, the Drought became an enemy to be overcome.

"——!" he sneered. "I'll be —— if it gets me!"

The cow had lain down.

"Hi, come on, Blinky," he tried to shout. "Get up. We're goin' to water!"

He seized her tail and yanked her to her feet. She stood there, unwilling to move. He was among the spidery ocatilla clumps

now. With his knife he cut a stick of it for a prod, and, sharpening it, he coerced the white-face into movement.

As the horseman receded, looking back once to wave a derisive farewell, the wolves came on again. With the judgment of the half-breed in his thought the beasts seemed more ferocious, more of a menace. Bud began throwing stones at the lobo.

The wolves sensed the new energy in the man and resented it. It put their meal farther ahead. The coyotes tried more desperately to worry the cow. The big wolf kept behind Bud better to avoid the stones and to whiff and snarl at the bloody tracks—and to approach from behind and snap.

Hour after hour they stumbled along in the wind and dust and thirst, Bud as steady as a plowman, prodding the Hereford, his rags and hair blowing out and seeming to lead him, naked except for a sleeveless undershirt and trousers ragged to the knees. He suggested an ancient Anglo-Saxon venturing through new land toward the setting sun, leading the van of the world-makers.

His feet bled and burned; but he put the pain out of mind by thinking of victory.

"We're going to water!" he would try to croak, and goad the slackening cow.

The cattle bandit's verdict kept at him like the chorus of a song—

"I'll leave you to the Drought!"

Bud as persistently answered it with a sneer, knowing that he had the white man's power behind him.

Milroy had picked up somewhere—in Sunday supplement, talk of army officers, sermon, or maybe the Bible—the idea that the invisible God of Israel is the Anglo-Saxon man's might and right and breath.

"The half-breed," he thought, "he's going to make a slip. It's him the Drought will get, because he don't see right. He ain't got a white man's—guts—er God!"

The cow seemed now to have lost any scent of water. Evidently the springs that had been giving a sachet to the atmosphere had finally dried out. Anyhow much of her holding to the southward course undoubtedly had been due to the original impulse to find drink in that direction, and this impulse was now smothered in utter distress. She became a vessel without a compass, turning her nose in any direction as the gusts swayed her and the boulders tripped her feet. Bud held as best he could to the south, knowing that sometime they would reach the boundary river.

Eventually it became necessary to rest frequently. Bud would not let himself think in how bad a way he actually was.

In the late afternoon the cow picked up energy in a surprizing manner. She switched around into the face of the wind and bawled eagerly. She started off obliquely into the wind. Nothing but a whiff of water-freshness could have caused this. Bud followed as best he could on his swollen feet.

It was a false hope. When Milroy arrived at the place where the cow had stopped he found a tiny basin in the rocks where a spring had trickled. But it was drunk dry and no water flowing. Deer signs, quite fresh, were all around.

The cow lay down. Even with tailing her she would exert no slightest effort. It was evident that she had given up. The coyotes and the lobo watched and whined. At last out of patience, Bud walked off.

"Lay there!" he snarled within himself. "I can go on without you."

He had not gone forty steps before the wolves were crowding in. Because Bud was of the Anglo-Saxon breed he couldn't stand it, after having depended on the cow, for he knew she could travel yet if she could be started. He went back; and, gathering blades from dry yucca stalks set them on fire against her belly. As the hair scorched and the heat ate in, she got up.

Bud, holding her tail to keep her steady when she swayed, goaded her with the sharp stick. At times he swung the stick at the wolves.

Toward nightfall the weather changed. The bitter north wind fell away almost in a breath.

A new phase of the drought presented itself. The dust, instead of blowing away, fogged up chokingly. The cow, the wolves and the man were in clouds of dust that made them cough and sneeze.

The presentiment came as darkness spread that the half-breed had been right—the Drought would get him. Then he chuckled.

"Get out o' the way, you hoot-owl thought! You can't scare me. Move on, bossie. Beat it, wolves. To —— with you, feet!"

Something came, though, that he did not

foresee. In the darkness of the dust fog before the moon had looked over the tops of the peaks up there to the left, he walked into a huge big-eared cactus with spines like needles.

In the sudden agony of the thing he leaped aside, and his feet coming down on rocks he gave way to favor them and fell in a heap.

Instantly the wolves were at him. On his knees, he struck out with the goad, landing on bodies.

He felt the big wolf's feet strike his shoulders behind, felt the hot mouth against his ear. He turned, rising at the same time, seizing the wolf's jaw and one leg. In an instant they were facing each other, the wolf reared to his hind legs.

The wolf twisted its head and snarled, trying to break the hold on its lower jaw. Bud shifted his left hand and got it against the lobo's nose.

He realized that the cow had turned on the coyotes. They were engaged behind him, the cow evidently enraged by the vicious snarling of the attack on the man.

Bud's thought was to break the wolf's jaws. He threw all his gaunt strength into pushing and pulling to tear the flesh and ligaments. It was a savage struggle.

Then fear entered the wolf. His attack changed to the defensive. He began to jerk backward and to twist his head. He jerked loose, and leaped aside.

Bud's bare arms were bleeding from the wolf's claws. He breathed pantingly through a mouth dust-dry. But he found his stick and croaked to the cow:

"Houp! Go on to water. The Drought can't stop us!"

The moon topped the peaks. The travelers gained a high ridge across which a balmy south breeze drifted. The beasts sniffed eagerly. The wolves took abrupt departure. The cow picked up her speed, lowing plaintively.

Bud was swayed by varying emotions. It might be another dry hole. It might be the Rio Grande—yet miles off. He was tempted to hurry on alone, to cease helping the stumbling white-face over the gullies. But some instinct told him he would be proud of his manhood afterward if he stuck it out with the cow. He held himself back.

But in the end the cow failed. Going up a steep hill, capped against the southern sky with rim rock, she kept sliding on the loose rock until she went down. All the effort Bud could muster failed this time to get her up. She had surrendered.

In the midst of his exhausting efforts there came the sound of a snarling fight up the hill, up over the rim rock. Then a deer—there was a clear flash of a buck's horns in the brilliant moonlight—leaped down from the rock not so far above and disappeared in the shadow.

Bud knew. There was water up there, or had been but just now, else the wolves would not have gone on. He left the cow and struck for the top on hands and knees.

IN THE Chisos Mountains, and the clump of Chinetas, and the Davis Range, as well as a half-dozen other groups in southwest Texas, like the Barilas, the Smokies, the Delawares, the Eagle Mountains and the Glass Range, the deer and bear hunter combing the little cañons of the heights, will find on the flat tops of the peaks, now and then, holes in the solid rock like wash-tubs or small wells. They may have been made by frost and wind or ancient earthquake. Some have cracks and are dry. Here the deer often lie away from the wind and man. Others are tight and have been known to hold water the year round.

Long, strong grass growing in cracks and the sparse soil often leans over the wells and covers them against evaporation.

It was such a well that Bud found on top of the butte. Topping the rim, he caught sight of two deer on the opposite side of the little flat, ready to flee, shying around the edge. The three coyotes and the lobo were by a black spot—the pool. A bobcat sat back spitting.

The beasts gave way as Bud approached. He saw that the tall grass all around was trampled down.

By the edge of the hole he got down and struck a match and peered in. Grass was bent down over the edge all around. The flare of his match was reflected. He did not look too closely to see if anything had drowned. With the stick he touched bottom.

He slid in. He dropped to his knees. He plunged his face into the water.

One swallow! He fought against drinking more, against gulping until the mad thirst was slacked. Almost panicky lest he give in, he started to climb out. He had

seen a man or two drink too much under like circumstances.

"——," he decided, "I can think; I can control myself!"

He dropped to his knees then and began to throw the water over himself. He filled his mouth repeatedly and squirted it out. How good it felt!

The water was only ankle deep. The rim of the hole was just about to his ears. It was such a hole, he saw, as a deer might jump down into and leap out of again if it had strength. Undoubtedly the reservoir had not been discovered by the wild life until the final drying-up of the country had keened their nostrils to a finer edge.

Bud removed his underwear and soaked it, wrapping it in his trousers to retain as much water as possible, and carried it to the cow. He wrung out about a pint of water into her mouth. Crawling back naked, he found on the way the skull of a cow, and one horn was long and straight, so that he knocked out the porous bone inside and had a cup that would hold about a quart. Three times he carried this down to the white-face. Then he got her up and drove her to the summit.

The wolves, evidently having drunk, refused to give up their prey easily, but kept trotting around, still whimpering and watching. The bobcat was no longer to be seen.

Where the cow piled down Bud built a fire of twigs and sticks from a flattened cedar. He sat down by it with his back to a boulder. Weariness was thick upon him. He knew he would sleep, so he put himself on guard by resolving to rouse at the first near noise or touch or attack.

THE fire on the hill which Bud ascended probably could have been seen in some directions for thirty miles. Obviously then it could have caught the eye of a traveler two or three miles away. Bud was aware that it burned up brightly; then he slept.

He was aroused by the expected attack—or so it seemed. He jerked to wakefulness. A body was over him. He seized—hands.

"*Señor, señor,*" pleaded a voice. "Water! Water!"

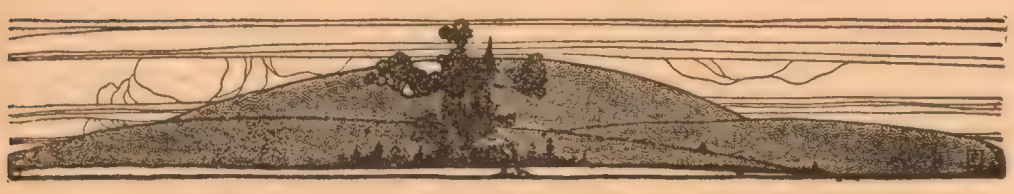
Bud, up on his knees, almost unbelieving, half-shoved the man toward the *tenaja.* The thirsty one saw, ran to it, dropped down on his hands and knees and peered in. Then he slid in feet first.

The ranger followed. He dropped down astride the body on all fours as the thirsty throat gulped water. He took the revolver from the scabbard. Back at the fire, which he kindled from glowing coals to a blaze, he saw that the revolver was his pearl-handled pet, loaded. An odd look came over his face.

"Funny," he thought, "what the Drought does. I wonder what happened to him?"

He strode back to the water-hole, and holding the gun down below the rim, fired a roaring shot into the water.

"Hi, there," he said grimly, "come up out of that before you kill your fool self. You and me, Nutmeg, are going to discuss the ownership of boots before we go hikin' into ranger headquarters together; savvy?"



# THE GOAT-MAN

## by ROBERT SIMPSON

*Author of "Up-Stream."*

FROM Danny Kellegher's point of view a West African trading-factory had its limitations, like Dartmoor or Sing Sing. You signed a paper in Liverpool just before you sailed and the trading-firm's agent-general said Warri or Sapeli or Bonny or Opobo or Bakana or Segwanga or some other place, and you went out on a steamer that took about three weeks to reach whichever place the agent-general said; after which you stayed there, sizzling in your own fat, till your two-year sentence ran out.

Of course, you wore a sun-helmet and took five grains of quinin every day, changed your clothes three times in each twenty-four hours, bought palm-oil and kernels and rubber from the native traders and met a lot of funny-looking natives who filed their teeth and who stopped looking quite so funny after a while and became monotonous.

You had a black boy to do all your work, and, if you felt that way, you booted him until you were sure he knew you were the boss. That part of it was not so bad. Your pay was "all found," including the boy, and if the firm's agent in charge of the factory were the right sort your beer and cigarets were free, too. But it was no life for a man who was aching for a chance to meet MacPhail again.

Maybe there were three—maybe four—white men on the factory besides yourself, but that did not make any difference. They got on your nerves like the quinin and the canned salmon. And you never went anywhere. Not unless you were transferred to another factory because somebody had died or been invalided home.

Otherwise you stayed; and after one or two experiences you kept away from the native villages, because the things you learned there were not good for you. Consequently you nursed a secret grouch, that was not as secret as you thought it was, till a steamer came up-river with a refrigerator on board.

Then you made up a party and went as close to the refrigerator as you could get—which was the bar—and drank more ice-cold beer than you should have done, and, if your stomach was in the mood for it, you got black-water fever and died and were buried before morning.

Danny was Marsden & Co.'s beach-clerk. He was also an unimaginative product of Glasgow's Gallowgate. To the initiated that means that he had achieved his teens by sheer force in a locality adjacent to and just one rung higher in the social strata than the Saltmarket, which is Glasgow's equivalent to London's Whitechapel or the Bowery of New York.

Danny remembered the Saltmarket almost as well as he did the Gallowgate, and the things he remembered about it were not nice. Saltmarket folk had a queer way of fighting for one thing, and the most vivid memory Danny had was that of a man—a great brute with a round, short-cropped head—who had fastened his hands

"The Goat-Man," copyright, 1922, by Robert Simpson.

in a woman's streaming hair close to the neck and——

Danny had been vaguely conscious then that he did not belong there, and the incident, though he had not been aware of it at the time, had marked his departure at a comparatively early age from his natal environment. Having long since left it behind him, he was now developing an acquaintance with the fraternity commonly designated as "palm-oil ruffians," of which he was one.

He was compactly put together and entirely self-contained; and had dodged malaria and black-water and cro-cro and other things of kindred persistence and prevalence with the same complacence that he had dodged bottles and brickbats in the Gallowgate. Regarding his immediate existence through eyes that were shrewdly cold and gray, he demanded of life food in sufficient quantity to satisfy a normally healthy appetite, tobacco in equal proportion, a chance to square things with the girl who had called him a hooligan and the opportunity to meet MacPhail again.

Most of the time Segwanga seemed a long way from MacPhail and everything else that was naturally desirable. It was a place imprisoned within walls of mangrove-green. In the dry season it blistered in the heat of the tropical sun, till the clay-built trading-beaches shriveled and cracked and the near-naked blacks haunted the mango-tree shade or lay stark and motionless in the shadow of the white traders' stores.

When the rains came it wallowed and sweated and did business as best it could between tornadoes; paid more attention to the doctor and became acutely aware of mother and Heaven and the exact location of the cemetery.

Danny had no mother to think about. Heaven was farther away than MacPhail and he never thought about the cemetery.

A second look at Danny's squarely built body and somewhat neutral physiognomy revealed the fact that there was a pale-blue mark, like a scar, across the bridge of his nose and that two of his upper front teeth were too good to be true. And in point of fact Danny had nearly swallowed the original molars when MacPhail had hit him. Danny did not know what MacPhail had hit him with, but he was quite sure he had not done it with his hands.

The thing had happened, as such things have a tendency to happen, in the vicinity of a Liverpool water-front "pub." Danny was foggy on the subject of how he had arrived there and had never been able to get any very coherent explanation of it from MacPhail. He had been introduced to MacPhail by the brother of the girl who had called him a hooligan, the brother being the cashier in Marsden & Co.'s Liverpool office and entirely responsible for both MacPhail and Danny having any connection with the firm.

From the beginning Danny had not liked MacPhail. Aside from the fact that he wore cloth-topped shoes that buttoned and spoke with an English accent that did not belong to him, there was something fishy and unreal about him that suggested a make-up that could be rubbed off. He was older than Danny by several years, ostensibly a "man of the world" who seemed perfectly at home in any society.

At least, such was the girl's opinion expressed in tones that were admiring and friendly. It was she who had suggested that they get to know each other better, and since they had been scheduled to sail for West Africa on the same steamer, they had made an effort to celebrate the circumstance two evenings removed from the sailing date. The final evening at home Danny was to have spent with the girl, whose name as far as he was concerned was Alice. MacPhail called her Miss Mellor.

The evening of celebration had begun quite properly in Lime Street but had degenerated in some way or other until it had drifted completely out of Danny's control. Then in the previously mentioned water-front pub the celebrants had tried to conclude the merry-making with a discussion upon the Grand National, the battle of Balaclava and the distance between a certain sawdust-filled box and the public-house door, but had agreed upon none of these things. And Danny was not sure, when they had carried the argument into the adjoining alley, whether he had succeeded in hitting MacPhail or not.

That was not important. When his nose had healed and new teeth had taken the place of the old, he knew that MacPhail had sailed for West Africa according to schedule and that he, Danny Kellegher, had not.

Danny was not vindictive. In fair fight he

could lose to a better man like a gentleman.

But when you get hit with a brick or a marlinspike and you lose a good job and several teeth and a lot of money, and your girl calls you a hooligan and withdraws all sympathy and you have to apologize to her brother and tell his boss you are sorry you didn't show up on time, and the boss gets even with you by sending you to a place like Segwanga where you might as well be in jail, you have some cause for complaint, particularly when MacPhail says in a letter that you must be crazy to imagine that he had anything to do with it.

Anyway you ought to know what it was he hit you with, because if he didn't do it with his hands——

"WHAT'S the matter you all time sad?"

Danny, who was leaning against the hand-crane on the oil-wharf, came out of his late afternoon reverie with a start to find a lithe and exceptionally attractive young Jakri woman, with a shiny, plump and naked baby straddling her hip, regarding him with a sympathetic interest.

She was dressed in a brilliant yellow overcloth and there was a passionately red silk handkerchief wound about her head, on which she balanced a squash-shaped calabash. In Segwanga she was known as Ilona, the daughter of Agwala. She was also the third wife of Benniba, Marsden & Co.'s ex shop-boy, who since a certain affair of blood that had transpired in the dark of Atba Creek had but one ear. The baby on her hip was a very young baby—Benniba's first-born son.

"Hello, Ilona! And a piccanin'! What is it? A man or a woman?"

Ilona's height visibly increased. To her the question was superfluous because all her children were going to be men-children. Let Benniba's other wives bear him daughters!

"Them time you show me Benniba coffim, I done tell you my son go be you frien'," she said simply enough. "This be my son. I bring him so you go look him."

Danny was not a family man. He knew nothing of babies, white or black, but he knew enough to admire the infant and to flatter Ilona's maternal pride. He had almost forgotten that he had once done the girl a service. To him the thing had been just a little morbid and bothersome, but otherwise trivial; a matter of allowing her to see two imported coffins that had been in the general store.

One of them was Benniba's, and it was still there. The other had belonged to a certain Chief Oagadi of Akwanna, who had died a month or so later, and Danny assumed that Oagadi had been buried in it according to established custom. But Ilona knew better; and her story in that connection has already been told.

Danny allowed the baby to fumble undecidedly with his thumb and forgot MacPhail and the jail-like atmosphere of Segwanga for a minute or two. Ilona looked pleased. Then she asked—

"You go foh you country, li'l bit?"

Danny scowled. He was not going to leave Segwanga to go home for six long months yet, and the fact annoyed him every time he thought about it.

"Six moon pass, I go," he informed the girl moodily.

"Then you come back?"

"Come back! *Here?*"

Ilona nodded.

"Wha's matter? You no like Segwanga?"

"Black man like gov'ment barrack?"

The girl grinned as, with a deft and gentle heave, she fixed the straddling baby more comfortably on her hip. The government barracks meant the "chain-gang," and certainly black men did not like that.

"You sick?"

"No."

"You white wife run 'way with 'nother man?"

"I haven't any wife."

"No get wife! Wha's matter?"

Danny did not answer that. The girl in the case was strictly his own affair, but after a while he asked with feigned indifference—

"You savvy Nawamba?"

"Nawamba? That be bush-place pass Siluko. White man cut tree dere. You want go Nawamba?"

After the native fashion Danny shrugged his shoulders, but Ilona knew that it was only a bluff. Nawamba, for some reason or other, meant much to Mas' Kellyer. Therefore, it immediately meant much to her because the eternal friendship of her son had been dedicated to him. Until her son grew up she, Ilona, was required to take his place; which was simple Jakri logic and inviolable.

"You want go Nawamba?" she repeated. "Black man no like Nawamba."

Danny stopped pretending that he was watching a lizard-fight that was taking place on top of a string of empty oil-casks.

"What's matter black man no like Nawamba?"

"Benniba say white man who cut tree at Nawamba be all same goat."

"Goat? What for?"

"I no savvy. Be so Benniba say, da's all. You want go Nawamba?"

Danny looked even more gloomy. He did want to go to Nawamba. It was a mahogany concession midway between Benin City and Siluko, and MacPhail had charge of it.

But there was not the remotest possibility of his ever going there, and though the natives who worked for MacPhail likened him somewhat mysteriously to a goat, that did not help very much. It only confused the issue. The natives, he knew, had their own private opinions of certain white men, but he never had heard them call one a goat before. Had MacPhail grown a beard or had he had a fever or the D. T.'s and tried to eat the bedclothes?

"Ask Benniba why he say Nawamba white man be all same goat," he suggested to Ilona after a minute or two.

"I go ask him," Ilona promised. "You want go Nawamba?"

"You think Nawamba come to me?"

Ilona grinned, then asked seriously:

"What you want make palaver foh Nawamba foh? You no like them goat-man?"

Danny did not commit himself in words and tried not to do so in any other way, but Ilona had good eyes and a shrewd knowledge of the ways of men. When a Jakri man had an enemy who was out of his reach, his face was long and his wives spoke in whispers. Danny had no wives to indicate his frame of mind, but his face, in spite of him, said all that was necessary.

"Suppose them goat-man come to Segwanga, you be all time sad?"

Danny's face brightened instantly; then darkened again because he knew how unlikely that was.

"You ask too many questions," he declared in an effort to be severe; then smiled at the baby straddling Ilona's hip and spoiled the whole effect.

"Be all ri'," Ilona assured him. "You be frien' foh my son. He go fix him."

Danny's attention came away from the plump and shiny baby sharply.

"What's that? He go fix—what?"

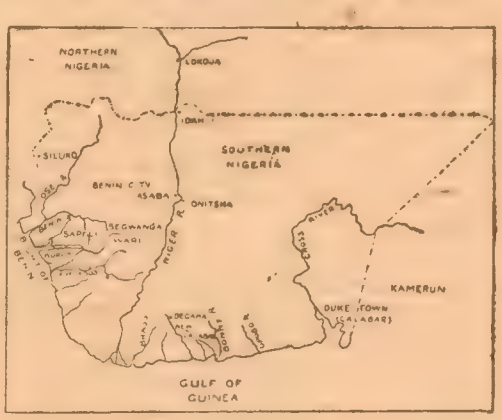
"Be all ri'. No trouble come. My son go bring Nawamba to dis place. He savvy *ju-ju* too much."

Danny laughed half-heartedly. He did not like his troubles to be trifled with. But when Ilona went away he forgot about her flippancy at once, because he knew that she did not mean to be disrespectful; just a little thoughtless, that was all.

ILONA went back to the village of Atba and spoke to Benniba, her husband, with her lips held closely to his remaining ear. And Benniba, nodding solemnly, as the head of a household should, said:

"The friend of my son is the friend of Benniba-Atba. Yet, though I have heard that the white man of Nawamba is called a goat, the name is like a leaf that goes up and down upon the wind. Many men may see and speak of it, but no one knows the tree from which it fell. Ilona may ask if Agwala will listen."

So the following morning before sunrise, with the plump and shiny baby upon her back, Ilona embarked upon a venture in a




one-woman canoe, the nose of which was turned toward Benin River.

Arrived there, she made obeisance before Agwala, her father, whose power in the Jakri country was greater than the power of the white man's money. That Ilona could speak to him at all, was a thing for women of lesser breed to envy.

Agwala's moods were as hard to detect as the firefly's light when the sun is up.

His rage and his laughter both were silent. But Ilona had a debt of blood upon her shoulders, and Agwala was her father. Therefore, he listened and presently he declared in all seriousness:

"When white men fight, they fight with the naked hands to bruise the face, or they kill at a great distance with big and little guns. Does Mas' Kellyer's anger seek to know the weight of the goat-man's heart?"

Ilona could not answer that. She knew only that Mas' Kellyer was hungry for the sight of the face of his enemy, the subsequent result of which consummation she could not even pretend to foretell. But Mas' Kellyer was a friend of her son who would live to make many sacrifices to the spirit of Agwala, if the latter could see his way to bring about the desired result.

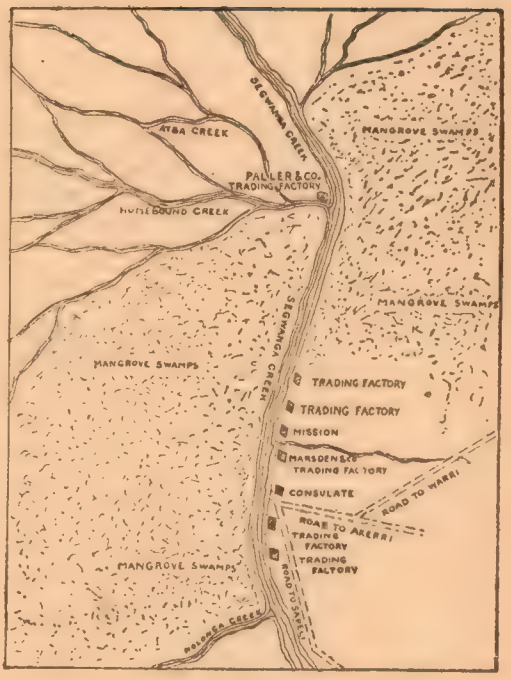
Agwala grunted then and the interview ended; but Ilona went back to Atba perfectly satisfied. She knew what that grunt meant.

SEVERAL days later Agwala's great forty-paddle canoe slipped alongside the consulate wharf at Segwanga, and Daniel Dane Parker, the district commissioner, became a perfectly innocent party to the business of paying a share of a certain plump and shiny manchild's debt of blood.

The "Great Dane," as the D. C. was most often called because his quite unaffected air of magnificence fitted his middle name so naturally, was quietly informed by Agwala that the white man in charge of Marsden & Co.'s mahogany concession at Nawamba was a disturbing influence upon the peace of that particular community.

There was no specific basis for the charge, and, of course, it was not asked that MacPhail be punished; simply that he be removed from Nawamba to Segwanga, where he could be more readily "observed." The thing from the Great Dane's point of view was unusual, but Agwala was so insistent, so earnest and yet so rational in the manner of making his recommendation that the D. C. was afraid there was something in it worth acting upon.

So he called upon Hogmanay Sandy MacGregor that afternoon. Hogmanay was Marsden & Co.'s agent in Segwanga and in the world of West African trade his was a name to conjure with. His diversions were a long, light-brown beard, Scotch whisky and a musical instrument he was pleased to call a penny whistle.




He listened to what the Great Dane had to say without even a monosyllabic interruption, and when the latter had finished he said briefly:

"All right. I'll swap Johnson for him. Will ye have another drink?"

The great Dane thought he would; and all of the wheels having been set in motion, there was no further need for conversation on the matter of MacPhail's transfer. A young man named Johnson, who was Marsden & Co.'s shop-clerk in Segwanga, did not know why he was sent up to Nawamba, nor did MacPhail receive any information regarding the reason for his transfer to the shop-clerk's job in Segwanga. It just happened.

And certainly no one was more startled by the unbelievable turn of events than Danny Kellegher, who had no knowledge whatever of how the powers of the Delta had moved so that he might meet his enemy face to face.

DANNY made it his business to be on the gig-wharf when MacPhail arrived one morning in an eight-paddle canoe. MacPhail, however, was the first to speak.

"Hello, Kellegher!" he drawled from the small, awning-covered deck amidships. "How are you? Glad to see you again."

He was bigger than Danny, particularly about the shoulders, neck and head, but when he stepped from the canoe to the wharf, placing his sun helmet on his large, short-cropped head as he did so, one might have observed that, from the waist downward he tapered away to almost uncomfortable thinness by the time his ankles were reached.

His complexion, like that of almost any other white man in the tropics, was pale, the mouth drawn and the eyes staring a little, and because his clean-shaven jaw was of the lantern order he looked more cadaverous than the average. Danny ignored his outstretched right hand and looked at him through half-closed eyes.

"Glad to see me, eh?"

"Why, yes." MacPhail's hand dropped imperturbably to his side. "You're looking fine," he said. "The climate doesn't seem to have affected you in the least."

He turned toward the canoe and, ordering his boys to fetch his baggage, prepared to stroll leisurely toward the stairway leading up to the living-quarters.

"Had any fever at all?"

"Wait a minute."

Danny planted himself squarely in MacPhail's path before he had an opportunity to step off the wharf.

"You're too polite," he continued. "And there's nothing polite about what I've been plannin' to do to you if I ever met you again."

"To me?"

"Yes—to you! You know what you did to me, don't you?"

"You mean——"

"And what you did it with?"

MacPhail laughed—a dangerous thing to do just then, but he did not appear to think of that.

"Oh, I see. You are still laboring under the old delusion that I sand-bagged you, or something of that sort?"

"Delusion, ——! You know ruddy well it's no delusion. I'll admit that I was drunk; but I wasn't spiflicated. You said the spittoon was only seven feet from the pub door and I said it was at least twelve, and then we went out into the alley——"

"What pub? What spittoon? What alley? You're twisted, Kellegher. Mixing me up with some one else. And it's too blamed hot to argue. Let's go on top and have a drink."

Danny did not move, and he saw nothing of the beach and river world about him—nothing but MacPhail's face.

"What did you hit me with?" he asked quietly. "A black-jack?"

"Now, look here, Kellegher——"

"I know all about that. But what did you do it with?"

"Heavens, but you are a persistent cuss! I left you about eleven o'clock that night at the entrance to Lime Street Station—"

"You left me in that alley with a broken face after you'd hit me with a mallet or something. What did you hit me with?"

"I'll admit you were not altogether sober when I left you at the station-entrance," MacPhail went on with equal persistence, his drawling accent belying his name every time he spoke, "but you looked as if you could navigate your own way home. I'm sorry you didn't, of course—rotten luck, and all that sort of thing—but I'd stop thinking about it if I were you, particularly where I am concerned. Since I've got to live in the same house with you now, old man, I don't want this bogy cropping up every time you begin brooding over it."

"Livin' in the bush hasn't damaged your nerves much," Danny commented dryly. "You talk like a lawyer, and you don't say anything about what you did it with."

"Great Scott! Haven't I told you that I left you——"

"You left me, all right. But I don't suppose you know any more about that than you do about the Nawamba niggers calling you the goat-man?"

MacPhail's eyes widened sharply and his long jaw dropped.

"Oh—er—yes. Heard of that down here, have you? Queer devils, these natives. Full of all sorts of superstitions. I haven't the faintest idea what they mean half the time. Odd conception, isn't it?"

"Very odd. Almost as odd as the story that you left me at Lime Street Station at eleven o'clock that night."

"You don't believe that?"

Danny dismissed the question with a gesture that left nothing to the imagination.

"And don't think I'm squealing or whining or anything like that. If you did it with your hands, that's all right, even if you were rotten enough to leave me there and then lie like an oil-trader about havin'

nothin' to do with it. That would be my palaver for bein' careless enough to get drunk in the company of a rat like you.

"But if you didn't do it with your hands—and I'll bet a ton of kernels to a thruppenny bit that you didn't—I'm goin' to make the score all square before I'm through with you. What *did* you do it with?"

MacPhail had listened attentively, betraying little or no sign of resentment. Apparently he was determined not to allow himself to be drawn into a brawl, and when Danny had finished, he lightly dabbed the perspiration from his face and neck with an ever ready handkerchief and glanced casually in the direction of a splash of yellow that had intruded itself into the corner of his eyes.

A strikingly attractive young Jakri woman who was entirely clothed in yellow, except for the red silk handkerchief wound about her head, lounged against the water-tank at the corner of the house and gave all her attention to a plump and shiny baby straddling her hip. That she had any interest in MacPhail or Danny or the canoe boys who were passing with MacPhail's trunks, was not in the least apparent.

"You are being aggravatingly unpleasant, Kellegher, for a purpose of your own," MacPhail declared at last when he had looked Ilona over. "And much as I might like to, I can't afford to allow the trick to work. I've done pretty well out here and I can't have your fancied differences affect my record at the home office. You see, I'm making no bones about that.

"Because white men don't scrap among themselves in this country. It's bad for discipline. We've got to agree whether we like it or not, and in any case I have no intention of turning hoodlum simply to satisfy your desire to get even with your bad luck by trying to punch my nose. That kind of thing's all rot. Bad for the system, like strychnin or arsenic or any other kind of poison. Better try to forget about it."

And then he calmly passed on.

Danny did not even attempt to stop him. In spite of the well-founded character of his convictions, MacPhail's plausibility made them rock like an ill-built shack in a high wind. When Danny moved in the direction of the oil-yard, his step was heavy and slow and he did not see Ilona until she came and stood at his rough table-desk and said softly—

"Them goat-man savvy talk palaver too much?"

"What's that?"

"He be smooth and shiny, all same black-beetle back. You savvy?"

"I savvy all right. But where do you come in? I mean—how you know he be goat-man?"

Ilona smiled a wispy, knowing smile.

"Be my son bring him to Segwanga. My son be you frien'. He savvy *ju-ju* too much."

Danny looked at Ilona, then at the baby, then back at Ilona again and shook his head.

"Too deep for me."

Ilona was not quite sure what he meant by that, but she could judge by his expression that the goat-man's arrival in Segwanga had not brought about the desired result.

"What you want do to them goat-man? Maybe so, my son fix dat, too."

A glimmering of comprehension came into Danny's face all at once.

"You mean you talked goat-man palaver to MacGregor and he bring MacPhail to dis place?"

"I no talk MacGreg'. I talk Agwala. Agwala be big man foh dis country. He fix. What you go do to them goat-man?"

Danny looked at the girl in pardonable amazement, gradually realizing just what she had done so that he might not look "all the time sad." Her perspicacity astonished him no less than her evident ability to live up to her obligations, however impossible the discounting of them might seem to be; and since she had brought about that for which he had most devoutly wished, it was obviously her expectation that he would take advantage of his opportunity.

"White man palaver be different from black man palaver," he said lamely, feeling that the explanation was not at all satisfactory even to himself. "I glad you bring goat-man to Segwanga. That be good. I remember Ilona son long time."

And he gravely shook the plump and shiny baby's hand just as if the infant were already a man. The child gurgled at him and Ilona smiled a maternal smile of satisfaction, knowing that though the ways of the white man in his anger were strange beyond belief, her son's fidelity to the name of friendship remained unsullied.

Then, being convinced by Danny's uncommunicative demeanor that there was nothing further she would be permitted to do in the matter, she departed, leaving him to contemplate the blank wall of the problem—quite alone.

IN ALL his variegated history, Danny had never been more alone than he was in the month that followed. Neither had he ever felt more futile or impotent. While it was true that MacPhail was not enjoying his stay at Segwanga because, for some reason or other, he was in Hogmanay Sandy MacGregor's black books, the smooth complacence of the man—"brass," Danny called it—and his continued refusal to admit that there was any cause for dispute between himself and Danny, made life more miserable for the latter than prickly heat.

MacPhail was always painfully polite, too, even when he was studiously ignoring Danny's obvious desire to produce some justification for reducing the argument to the elemental plane of the clenched fist. In fact, he annoyed Danny much more by being in Segwanga than he had done when stationed in inaccessible loneliness at Newamba.

Also it was apparently impossible to find out why he had been called the goat-man. Ilona did not know; neither did Benniba, her husband, nor any one else as far as Danny could discover. The blank wall at the end of the first month had become, if anything, more impenetrable than ever.

Then there came an evening—after dinner.

Had Danny been a hero of more conventional mode, he would have permitted no sound to escape him—would have gone into MacPhail's room for the rubber stamp he wanted, would have seen the photograph and ignored its presence upon MacPhail's table as if it were of no consequence, and turning upon his heel, he would have gone right out again.

Instead, the instant he saw the photograph he demanded belligerently and as if he had an inalienable right to know—

"Where did you get that?"

MacPhail, who was writing a letter, put aside his pen and looked up. The storm-clouds hovering over Danny's face did not appear to affect him in the least.

"That? Oh, you mean Miss Mellor's photograph? I've had that one some time. Good card, isn't it? But I have a snap-shot she sent me last week that I like still better. I am writing her now."

He leaned back in his chair in a friendly sit-down-and-have-a-chat sort of way.

"You know, Kellegher, Alice liked you. She liked you a whole lot. But you couldn't keep your feet, and that is something she could not forgive in any man. Nevertheless, I think she would have considerable respect for you if I could write and tell her that you had been man enough to shake hands and wish us luck."

"Luck?"

Danny said it dumbly and stood with his feet planted wide apart.

"Yes."

MacPhail remained seated.

"Didn't you know about it?" he asked.

"About what?"

"That Alice and I are engaged?"

Danny laughed as the knife went home—laughed foolishly at first, then uproariously and left the room still laughing. After a while he found that he was sitting in his own room grinning stupidly into space and wiping a cold and clammy sweat from his forehead. He had forgotten the rubber stamp.

Presently he sent a boy for the stamp and then tried to write a letter to "My dear Miss Mellor," in which he hoped that she would be very happy, in spite of the fact that he could not see his way to shake hands with MacPhail; there being some things which you can't do if you have any respect for yourself. Of course, if she were satisfied, that was the main thing, but——

Even as he wrote, Danny knew he would never mail the letter. He was simply relieving his system of certain sentiments which, there being no one to tell them to, looked soul-satisfying on paper.

AND, in any case, the letter was never completed. A raucous bellow, followed by a commingling of sounds that were as savage as they were hilarious, disturbed the black quiet of the African night as exploded dynamite might have done.

Whereupon Danny, listening a moment or two, put down his pen and his pipe, eagerly stuck a battered panama upon his head and descended post-haste to the beach below. No one accompanied him. It was his duty as beach-clerk to see that the

peace of the beach was properly preserved; and, just as he had done, every one knew where the disturbing sound had come from.

The Kroo-boy laborers—hired in gangs and housed in a dwelling that on the inside looked like the forecastle of a sailing-ship—had evidently become possessed of more than their lawful allowance of square-face gin and were beginning to make a night of it.

Sometimes such a situation terminated in a joke; at other times it didn't. It depended largely on the beach-clerk. If he knew his business there was little, if any further trouble after he poked his head in at the Kroo-house door.

If he was a fool—and there were numerous ways of being several kinds of a fool under the circumstances—the climax was inclined to be attended by violence and bloodshed, and even a hanging or two under government supervision, because the Kroo-boy, in his rage, does not use his hands like a white man. He knifes his enemy or tears him apart, or both.

Danny was known to be a good beach-clerk who understood the Kroo-boy at his best and his worst. Consequently no one even thought of accompanying him to the Kroo-house. If any one had he would have looked upon such interference as an insult and he was in no mood that evening to be insulted by anything. His favorite color of the moment was red.

In fact, he was altogether too eager to reach the scene of the disturbance, which was made up of a groan or a screech or a wail, according to the individual Kroo-boy's manner of expressing his appreciation of his opportunity. And it might be laid down as an ironclad rule of conduct under conditions of the sort that no one who has just learned that Alice—or whatever her name happens to be—has gone over to the enemy, should attempt to cope with a gang of drunken Kroo-boys.

Danny, however, was of the opinion that he had never felt more equal to such an occasion. When he turned into the short lane which was bordered on one side by the long, low built Kroo-house and on the other by a solidly constructed barbed-wire fence, which was intended to keep predatory Kroo-boys and others out of the oil-yard, he quickened his step and did not even wait for the hesitant watch-boy who was trotting toward him, pretending to be in a great hurry to afford him the light of his hurricane-lamp.

As the door of the Kroo-house was at the upper end of the lane, which terminated in a *cul-de-sac* formed by the gable of a small storehouse, the fact that there was but one way out of the place would become acute in the event of retreat being necessary. But Danny gave no thought to such a contingency.

He went up to the Kroo-house door and was on the point of pushing it open when it was drawn suddenly away from the touch of his hand, precipitating him a lurching step or two into the smoke-filled, evil-smelling interior and into collision with the headman, who had been coming out.

The headman, whose name was Grolla, was a big, solemnly industrious Kroo-boy, who appeared at all times to be nursing a secret sorrow. Just then, however, he was grinning, and he continued to grin even after he realized who the intruder was.

Behind him, lolling in near-naked abandon upon the dirt floor or hanging maudlingly out of the double tier of bunks along the walls, black sweat-glistening bodies and the whites of many eyes and teeth were hazily visible in the smoke-dimmed light of a small lantern that stood upon an empty kerosene-case in the middle of the floor.

Some of the faces grinned at Danny just as the headman did; others looked doubtful and frightened, while the rest ignored him altogether and went on groaning or wailing or shrieking, as the case might be.

The air was heavy with the stench of gin and smoke and sweat, and the problem confronting Danny when he stumbled through the doorway was as sensitive as its setting was malodorous. But while Danny's sense of smell was acute enough his bump of caution had been sadly deflated by the sledge-hammer force of MacPhail's most recent and most matter-of-fact announcement.

Consequently he did not back out with a bluffing display of authority, so that he might have an opportunity to gather reenforcements sufficiently impressive to produce peace without a fight. Instead, he went a step nearer to the headman and demanded pugnaciously—

"What are you grinning at?"

The headman leered and swayed.

"Grin? I no savvy grin. Be gin do um. Gin be good too much for black man belly.

Gin make black man glad all same twenty wife. Pouf! You be small boy. Go 'way."

And he shoved a great gnarled hand into Danny's face.

The action was so unexpected—so revolutionary—that Danny was in no wise prepared for it, either mentally or physically. He staggered back a few steps, steadied himself while the headman roared with laughter, then leaped forward, his gray eyes colder than death itself.

When Danny struck, it was difficult to tell which of his hands struck first; the left to the jaw or the right that sank into the headman's solar plexus so that he appeared to drop off Danny's fist rather than fall away from it. In any case the headman just sagged to the floor in a leaden heap and remained there, while Danny stood over him, hurling whip-lash commands and expletives at the others in a mixture of Kroo and Jakri and pidgin English.

Some of those who were sober enough to be impressed by the fall of the headman, obeyed his orders and crawled into their bunks. But others, who were already in their bunks, rolled out of them; and, together with a few ugly-looking customers who had been sprawled upon the floor, they moved toward Danny and his victim either to attack or to learn whether the headman was as dead as they thought he was; Danny did not know which.

They were the brothers and cousins which every headman tries to include in his gang, not only for pecuniary reasons but also to support his authority; and when they had staggered near enough to look blearily upon the face of their fallen leader harsh, guttural mutterings passed from one to the other.

"Back!"

Danny stepped menacingly across the prostrate headman; but the Kroo-boys retreated not an inch, and suddenly, as if of one mind, they snarled in drunken rage and crowded forward.

Only because he was more sure of foot than they, Danny managed to avoid the disaster that lay in that first rush and retreated hurriedly with a sidewise motion toward the door, using his feet rather than his hands, hacking at the ankles of the enemy whenever he could.

Howls of pain and loud oaths in Kroo told how successful he was; but ere he reached the door he knew that one of the headman's brothers had managed to slip behind him and was tipsily swaying between him and freedom.

Danny turned then and plunged at the black in the doorway—head down, feet up—something like a human cannon-ball. His feet struck the Kroo-boy somewhere about the knees, and they both rolled out into the blackness of the lane beyond.

There was no sign of the watch-boy and his lamp, and when Danny stood upright again there were hazy, half-naked forms lurching in front of him—between him and the lane's only exit.

A large hand made a grab for his shoulder and caught the sleeve of his shirt, and the others closed in immediately. Literally tearing himself out of his captor's grasp, leaving most of the shirt sleeve behind him, Danny swiftly backed away until he felt his shoulder-blades pressing against the corrugated iron gable of the storehouse. And there he fought for his life.

He made little, if any, sound; took no thought of the number of the thickly breathing, sweating shadows before him and feared only a possible knife thrust in the dark. In the first few minutes the days of his youth that had been spent on the football field stood him in better stead than anything he had learned of the science of the prize-ring, because nothing will take the desire for fight out of a Kroo-boy—or any other negro for that matter—better than a kick on the shin; nothing except the sole of a white man's boot implanted in his stomach.

Danny tried both indiscriminately, using his hands only as guard, or whenever he was quite sure of hitting the jaw he aimed for. But that could last only for a little while.

Clutching hands had torn Danny's shirt to shreds in less than a minute. His face and neck were bleeding from numerous scratches, large and small, and though he was scarcely aware of it, a red trickle coursed down his right arm, proving that there was an uncertain knife-hand somewhere in the stertorous-breathing press before him.

Presently his legs would crumple under him; after which the climax would not be fit to print. But just as he was on the verge of taking the desperate chance of plunging through to freedom a tremendous bellow that came from the other end of the lane—a sound like rolling thunder coming nearer and nearer—put new life and energy into him as a glass of raw brandy might have done.

Instantly the pressure slackened off, and some of the Kroo-boys on the outer fringe of the little mob had actually reached their bunks in the Kroo-house before Hogmanay Sandy MacGregor's village-blacksmith-like figure loomed out of the dark in the feeble light of a hurricane-lamp in the hand of the watch-boy who had gone fearfully for help.

Behind MacGregor, just a foot or two, was a Cornishman kernel-clerk, who had but recently arrived from England. He was built upon MacGregor's pattern, and went about the business in hand with a soundless, machine-like precision that was, from Danny's point of view, a joy to watch. MacPhail brought up the rear vaguely.

For a minute or two perhaps the snarl of the Kroo-boys who had defiantly remained, the shouting orders MacGregor issued, the thudding impact of heavy fists upon naked flesh—the indeterminate jumble of the fight in the half-dark—made any coherent description impossible. When MacGregor or the Cornishman struck—and they did not waste their blows—a Kroo-boy went down and stayed down. Danny was out of it almost entirely.

Leaning limply against the corrugated iron gable of the storehouse, gasping for breath and managing to keep his feet only by sheer effort of will, he became a mere spectator, capable of action in his own defense only when a Kroo-boy bolted wildly in his direction.

And then all at once he became acutely aware of MacPhail, who had been but a shadow in the background of events up to that moment.

MacPhail was wrestling with a Kroo-boy who wore an overcloth and shirt, and it was immediately evident to Danny that, having allowed the black to get to close quarters, MacPhail was not only no match for him but was also in danger of having his ribs cracked or his neck broken when the Kroo-boy would pick him up—as he surely would—and throw him against a fence-post or the storehouse gable, or anything else that was handy and hard.

Danny's limbs came to life in an instinctive effort to help, because both MacGregor and the Cornishman were too busy elsewhere; and then when he was about a yard away he stopped, arms hanging, legs weaving, his eyes starting out of their sockets.

MacPhail's hands were gripping the Kroo-boy's shirt collar close in to the neck; his large round head was twisted sidewise so that the heaviest and largest part of the skull was upon a level with the Kroo-boy's nose; and with the speed and exactitude of a master of the curious art MacPhail smashed his head into the Kroo-boy's face, not once but many times.

Danny heard a sickening crunching sound—heard the Kroo-boy's frightened squeal of agony—and in a flash his mind leaped a void of years and he stood again in Glasgow's unsavory Saltmarket, where on a Saturday night he had seen a great brute of a man with a round, short-cropped head fasten his hands in a woman's streaming hair close into the neck and— He remembered her face afterward.

MacPhail was not that man, of course, but——

Danny gripped MacPhail by the back of the neck and yanked him away from his sick and reeling victim.

"You —— Saltmarket keelie! *That's* what you did it with!"

MacPhail's face, distorted by a brutal fury that was not good to look upon, suddenly lengthened, his eyes popping like those of a man who has awakened from an unusually bad dream. Then, seeming to realize that any further subterfuge was hopeless, he wrenched himself out of Danny's restraining hand and bolted.

DANNY never saw him again. Neither did the girl. By the time the Kroo-boys had been entirely subdued and hounded back into the Kroo-house to be placed under a government police guard until the morning, MacPhail had hired or commandeered a canoe, and with such of his possessions as were absolutely necessary he had departed.

Later it was learned that he had boarded a home-bound steamer at Forcados; that he went ashore at Las Palmas and did not return. After that it was supposed that he had shifted his course in a southerly direction—to Cape Town, most likely. But no one was very sure about it.

The truth about his antecedents was never definitely discovered, but it was easy to guess why he had been called the goat-man; and for Danny at least it was still easier to conjecture where he had learned the queer trick of butting with his head. When Danny had called him a Saltmarket

"keelie" there had been no denial in MacPhail's face; only a dumb amazement at being confronted with a self-confessed truth.

And, aside from the circumstance that the incident proved, beyond peradventure, MacPhail's rather ugly guilt in the matter of Danny's broken nose and good front teeth, and was therefore entirely responsible for Alice's scathing and unjust opinion of Danny it also declared that MacPhail's lofty claims to birth and breeding were grossly exaggerated.

Ilona, who expected Danny to be sadder than ever under the circumstances, could not understand him at all in the weeks and months that followed. She found him in the oil-yard one morning about two months later taking tedious inventory of a pile of scantlings, and, because he was whistling to himself, she asked as if she resented it:

"What's matter you all time glad? Goat-man run 'way an' now he nebber come back. You glad foh dat?"

Danny looked up, and there was no cloud over his eyes now. He knew why MacPhail had been called the goat man—and he also knew at long last what MacPhail had hit him with. In addition to which, he was going home in a couple of months to make it all right with the girl, who had written to say she was sorry—and—well——

He smiled a slow smile, Jakri-fashion, that hinted at much wisdom, and spoke directly to the plump and shiny baby.

"I glad because Ilona son savvy *ju-ju* too much."

# THE UNKNOWN QUANTITY

## by STANTON C. LAPHAM

*Author of "Gold is Where You Find It," "The Black Malemiut," etc.*

TRAGEDY was in the air. Both men could not have staked the same claim. In session two hours, the miners' meeting had acknowledged one man's filing, nothing more. One of them was a liar or the other guilty of the most reprehensible crime in the North—the destruction of another man's location notices. The question mark was in every mind. Like the brooding mystery of the Aurora overhead, wavering and dissolving in sinuous coils and silver-craped folds, secret, unknowable, impending fate cast a pallid light over the crowd.

It was in the days before the world moved up the river to Dawson. The first nugget of the Klondike that rattled "round the world" still calmly reposed on Bonanza bed-rock.

Circle City was "the Paris of Alaska;" "the Golden City of the River Yukon." A mud-splashed miner in hip-boots and six weeks' stubble of whiskers called it "the Camp of a Million Stumps and a Thousand Bow-wows." There were no police. Crime was rare. Miners' law was the Government; there were more malemiuts than people; and dust, at seventeen dollars, was plentiful.

Upon the respect of every man for every other man's corner-stakes and boundary-lines depended the title to property, and, on occasion, to life as well. The crowd of parka-clad, moccasin-footed miners sensed the inevitable that must one day judge the naked truth between the two claimants. They were touchy on the question of honor; it was the warranty deed of the Yukon.

Bob Densmore had been confronted with Stimpson's filing on the location he claimed on Preacher Creek. To the miners' meeting in "Happy Jack" McQuesten's store, Stimpson proved his location by "Half-Breed Charlie," his witness. He had offered his filing on the claim two days before Densmore mushed in from the stampede to Preacher Creek.

In Bob Densmore's mirthless laugh flung among them and the defiant flash of his eyes in their faces, the crowd felt the tension of the situation. His scorching gaze was a challenge, as if to say:

"So you fellows who have known me three years think that I'm a claim-jumper. There wasn't a ptarmigan track in the snow for a mile when I staked. You are willing to take this chechako's location on the witness of a half-breed."

Some there were who knew Bob Densmore well enough to wonder when the "show-down" would come, and how. Slow of speech, reserved, courteous, he was not a man one would be inclined to slap on the back and hail with a cheerful oath. From beneath his dead calm and deference to others some had seen the sudden spring of an unchained tiger. They had been astounded by an outburst of passion overleaping all control, that empowered the man with insane strength.

During the miners' meeting, when Stimpson swore to locating the claim, they surmised the whirlwind of fury that might precipitate death if he broke over, as they had seen him do. That was an unknown quantity, ominous with tragedy, communicating to them as they filed out of Happy Jack's store.

Stimpson, Half-Breed Charlie his witness and a few friends slipped out by the back way as Densmore left by the front. The quiet sneak did not set well with those who observed it. They were accustomed to looking facts and men in the face without blinking.

A man of his own height, bearing a striking resemblance to him in the poise of his head and his thick, almost round shoulders, accompanied Bob Densmore as he passed out through the crowd. More nearly a friend with Densmore than others, George Fenn knew his strength and weaknesses. He had reason to be thankful with his life for one of Densmore's outbreaks of irrestible impulse.

Throughout the hearing Fenn had kept near him. What the outcome would have been had Densmore flung himself on the narrow-faced Stimpson, Fenn was uncertain; only he was there to intervene, to save his greatest benefactor from murder. He knew that the possibility of such an event was every moment imminent. Life was never cheap in the North, and such a move by Densmore would have been a fatal mistake.

In Densmore's cabin, for an hour George carried the long end of a one-sided conversation. Densmore refused to discuss the finding of the miners' meeting. Once Fenn read in his eyes as they flashed frostily the shame and indignity that cankered and cut into his soul.

"The value of the claim, Fenn; who cares a —— for a few yellow nuggets, more or less? Dust is the cheapest thing in the Yukon. It's cheaper than grub or warmth or life—or—or——"

He stammered a moment, his reserve thawing as his eyes rested in friendly regard on the face of the man who had kept near him that day.

"—cheaper—yes, George—cheaper than friendship. Friends come high; they are worth more than a claim on Preacher Creek, I guess."

"Since that night on the Yukon," George began, "I guess you know how I feel about it. You were great; they couldn't stop you. I'd do anything to repay what——" He paused a moment.

"Let it go, George," interrupted Densmore. "It's nothing to talk about. I couldn't have helped it; I am that way. Don't mention it, George."

In that moment of generous impulse George Fenn could have pressed the claims of a friend on a friend. He could have counseled Densmore impressively against violence. But the plastic instant when a hand-grip, a word, might have averted the regret of a lifetime faded to ordinary talk of camp and creeks.

IT WAS morning—ten-thirty—stark-still, clear and blue. The prism-glittering snow whispered like silk beneath his moccasins as George Fenn trailed toward Densmore's cabin. Straight up through frosty, pulseless air, smoke rose from a hundred cabins.

A chill of nerves shivered through him when he fumbled at the latch and found Densmore gone. The night before he had readily acceded to Fenn's proposal that they haul wood part of the day.

It was a day, motionless as a picture, when men kept off the trails or traveled in pairs. A day when even the malemiuts, noses covered by great wolf-tails, lay curled-up balls, deep in the powdery snow. Fenn paused before the fireless cabin, fearful for the man under provocation of a great wrong, revealed to him as his friend.

Late-afternoon, making the round of dance-halls, saloons and gambling-joints, Fenn found Stimpson dealing faro in the North Star. There was a rumor that Densmore had been seen mushing on the Birch

Circle City is 70 miles up the southern branch of the Yukon.

Creek Trail. The move was mystifying. Fenn knew that Densmore had no business on the creeks to take him out on such a day.

Amid the clicking of chips and the drone of many voices, when Densmore's name was mentioned, some one remarked:

"Guess after what he got at Mc Questen's last night he'll likely shake Circle for a spell. After gettin' called to a showdown that way on a pair of deuces, a man ought to make himself scarce."

Stimpson came off shift at eleven o'clock. He had been instructed to "fade away," if Densmore showed up in the North Star. They did not want unpleasant notoriety. Stimpson was said to be "handy with a gun," and went heeled for trouble.

A couple of trail-burners, in from the creeks, reported that ground on Preacher Creek was showing good pay.

Wavering lights waltzed and folded in measured solemnity across a half-clouded sky that night, when George sought Densmore in his cabin for the second time. Uneasy of mind, he was driven by the impression that Densmore's absence boded trouble.

When his knocking brought no response George entered the cabin, wondering if Densmore had gone out on the trail at all. He groped about the table, feeling for the candle he knew Bob kept stuck in the end of a long-necked bottle.

In the cold the candle sputtered to the match. Picking up the bottle, a hand cupped behind the spluttering, uncertain flame, he turned to find himself looking into Bob's face, not three feet away.

Like a huge black jinnee, Densmore's shadow waved from side to side on the wall, in the candle light. He was dressed for the trail, the wolf-tail on his parka hood standing out and framing deep his fixed, unsmiling face. The vapor of their breathing rose in quick frost-white puffs between them.

"This is a —— of a time of day to pay me a visit, George."

Hesitating, he added—

"Well, I guess we can have a better light on the subject."

He moved to the table and lighted the lamp.

In the flood of light an object on the table riveted Fenn's gaze. There directly beneath the steady glow lay a blue-barreled forty-four, and heaped in the center of the table, a handful of ugly-nosed cartridges.

Cold-blooded violence or premeditated killing, Fenn would have sworn, was not in Densmore's nature. He had feared only an outbreak of fury if Bob should meet Stimpson or his half-breed witness.

Densmore's pitiless countenance and unblinking eyes, matching the cold steel and heavy-leaded shells, left little room for speculation as to his deadly purpose. He tapped the forty-four with his finger as he observed Fenn's astonishment.

"George, there are some propositions that can only be settled this way. You know what one of them is."

"That way has never settled anything," retorted Fenn. "That way will settle the

rumor that you go off your head when things don't pan your way. That gun will settle things the wrong way for you, Bob."

Densmore remained deaf to Fenn's words. Selecting a cartridge from the pile, he balanced it judicially.

"The chechako who gave me these, worked for the company that makes them. He told me that only one in ten thousand ever misses fire. One in ten thousand. Pretty sure cure for claim-jumping, eh?"

The coppery primer set deep in the end of the shell shone bright in the light. Densmore's voice was machine-like, unnatural. Was he right? The thought startled Fenn.

"George, if you're a friend, you didn't see me today, and I wasn't home tonight. Do you understand? I am not here. I left this morning, and I'll be camped up the Birch Creek Trail by daylight."

His laugh was as hollow and parroty as his words.

"Property and the whole country won't be worth a color, if this thing isn't stopped right now. I'll do the stopping."

George regarded Densmore silently a moment, and then began building a fire in the "sheet-iron."

From beside the fire he studied the countenance of this strangely passioned man, standing by the table, fingering the faded yellow missiles of death. His face was hard, drawn with the bitterness and misunderstanding of it all. A great compassion flooded Fenn's mind. Like the flash of a camera a picture appeared to him:

Beside the roaring, grinding tumult of the breaking Yukon he saw Bob Densmore. Bob was hurling withering curses at the cautious crowd on the bank, thrusting aside those who protested and sought to stop him. Contemptuous of death in the gorge of the current-gripped, swirling ice, Fenn saw him running out on the river. Crossing tilting floes, leaping, straddling, darting, stopping short, then leaping forward again. Possessed by a charm of strength and swiftness, he did not hesitate.

Far out on the mile-wide, churning avalanche he stopped. From the wreck of a Yukon boat he caught up an all but lifeless, broken-limbed man. It was Fenn himself. The faint cries of the man and a feeble signal of distress had in an instant empowered the rescuer with a reckless heroism that laughed at maelstroms of rushing ice-floes. Fenn opened his eyes and knew that Densmore had carried him in his arms, safe across the fury of the breaking Yukon.

That was the miracle of Fenn's life. Well he comprehended that the flaming-out of purpose, imparting maniacal strength, had been the blessing and the blight of Densmore's life. Stimpson dead; his friend Densmore a murderer; two wrongs could never make a right.

Beads of sweat stood out on Fenn's forehead as he looked again on the face of the man who had given him back his life; but he was confident. The deed—the red deed with the grim gun and death-tipped shells there on the table—should not be.

From a shelf before the window Densmore took a much battered alarm-clock. With the face to the light, he studied the time intently.

"Sent my watch to have it fixed," he reflected. "Cold is hard on watches."

The quick fire in the "sheet-iron" began searching out the frost. Densmore peeled out of his caribou parka and hung it beside the high window, let into the logs lengthwise.

He listened to the limpy, hesitating click of the clock. With painful deliberation he placed the clock exactly midway between the forty-four and the pile of cartridges.

George Fenn sat at the end of the table. Densmore, with a wave of his hand toward the clock, as if the combination of gun and time occupied his calculation, eased himself into a skin-backed chair opposite him.

It was ten-five. The clock and its associates formed an unpleasant picture in Fenn's imagination. His thought leaped to Stimpson leaving the North Star at eleven.

A swirl of snow scoured against the cabin and sifted noisily around the corner. They both listened. Densmore broke the silence.

"We'll have hard weather if the wind blows with her at forty below."

"Yes, she will bite at a man's heart," observed Fenn. "Forty and wind will freeze your blood traveling."

There was a long pause; the limpy clock seemed to drag out each reluctant click more uncertainly. Densmore arranged and rearranged the three objects on the table. Finally he was satisfied with the clock first, the gun next, and then the shells.

"Did you ever pick up any one that didn't make it through?"

Densmore was silent to Fenn's query.

"That trapper we found this side the

divide—I tell you Bob, he put up a game fight for life."

There was a briskness and cheeriness in Fenn's voice quite out of keeping with the thought of a struggle with death.

"A man will fight long and hard to live," Fenn continued. "He must have known all of one day that he didn't have a chance to make it. I'll never get over the sight of the trail in the snow. You could read every move he had made.

"He lived hard. He wasn't much, I guess; but life must have been good to him; he fought so hard to keep it. He had man stuff in him. He starved and froze by inches, but he kept right on mushing and stumbling and crawling.

"He nearly made it. One more mile—only one mile, and he'd be alive now. He didn't know that our camp was only a mile farther.

"But those tracks; I can see them now. God, life was dear to him."

George Fenn picked up a forty-four shell.

"Life is dear to anybody," he said; and added, "or to anything."

Densmore's face did not alter a line.

"Bob, did you ever see a man go out when he wasn't ready to go?" George continued. "I did once. Poor cuss, he died with his mukluks on. He wasn't ready; that was the —— of seeing him go, crying and calling us to help him. He got one of these."

Fenn turned the lead end of the cartridge toward Densmore, then dropped it on the table with a thud.

"He didn't even know for sure who shot him. He died hard, he was so strong; it took three hours. There wasn't a minister in a thousand miles, and all of us too dumb to say a word to help him over, if we'd known what to say. There isn't much a man can say when another fellow is mushing out the trail 'down the river!'

"I tell you, Bob, it's a hard game, watching a fellow go for three hours when he isn't ready. I told him if there was anything he wanted to make clean and square before he left, why we boys would do the right thing by him; we'd see him put straight for his debts or whatever we could do for him.

"It isn't in a man to talk hard about another when he's gone; but that fellow was about everything a man ought not to be. Yes, I guess he may have put some good man in wrong, too."

George regarded Densmore narrowly.

"Death is a strange thing. Even his dog knew that the poor cuss was going somewhere on a long trail, and he set up that malemiut death-song. What do you think makes a dog act like that when death is around?"

There was an indefinable something so direct and insinuating in the question, that Densmore with a gesture of impatience got to his feet and moved to the fire, remarking over his shoulder—

"Nobody know what makes dogs act that way."

"I was afraid of death when that poor cuss went on. It seemed so terrible."

George did not look Densmore's way.

"It wasn't that way when you came out on the Yukon for me," Fenn went on. "I knew there wasn't a chance. I had settled that when I got caught and jammed in the ice. I thought of a good many things. It's funny the things a man will think of when he knows he's going. I thought of a good many things that happened when I was only a little kid; and all the good things that were ever done for me. Then I woke on the island where you'd carried me.

"It's wonderful to save a life; that is the finest power in the world. Seems to me, Bob, that it is the greatest power of a man. But when I watched that fellow trail out, with the red on his lips and every little while the red breaking out in little swelling spurts from the round hole in his chest, with his eyes big and scared liked a little kid's—Bob, I knew that the power to take life was the most awful power of a man."

At the window, with a hand shaded around his face, Densmore peered long into the night.

Furtively George faced the clock toward himself. It was ten-forty. Densmore seemed to intercept the thought in Fenn's mind. "I am going out," he said.

He made a vague sign toward the center of town.

"You don't understand," he continued. "There is only one way. Right is right any place, but it is so —— straight in this country that you don't need jails and laws to understand what it is."

"There is something I want to say," Fenn hastened to interpose. "You can do as you please, Bob—that is about what you will do anyway—but don't you see how things are against you? What you are

going to do won't prove that you staked first. Charlie, the half-breed—he's so mixed you can't tell whether he will prove a good Indian or a bad white man. Stimpson? No one knows him, but it's a safe bet that what he is will show up quick enough."

"Safe?"

Densmore flung out a protesting hand.

"He'll come out of the North Star at eleven. Safe? Yes, I'll see him safe in —— where he belongs."

He turned to the table, and picking up the forty-four, he carefully inspected each shell as he filled the cylinder. Then as if dissatisfied he selected another cartridge, examined it and wiped it on his shirt sleeve.

He slipped it into a chamber from which he had removed a shell. Then, rolling the cylinder so that the cartridge would come under the hammer for the next shot, he snapped the gun together. Gathering up the shells, he disappeared behind a canvas hanging in front of the bed.

Fenn's hand rested on top of the clock; he gave the time-set a twist. The hands stood fifteen minutes slow.

"You don't want to go out tonight, Bob. You can't do it this way. Nobody could."

THE forty-four was not in sight when Densmore reappeared. His face was hard, and his eyes were as steady as two steel points. He moved uneasily about the room. He removed his ratskin cap and caribou parka from the peg beside the window. Then, observing the clock, he laid them on the chair.

"It's breaking away clear."

George measured each word.

"The risk. Bob, you are taking big chances tonight. It's turning light as day. Somebody is sure to see you going out."

For reply Densmore silently eyed the window; a soft glimmer of spectral light shone through it.

His foot on a chair, Densmore slowly relaced one of his mooseskin moccasins and laid a pair of soft caribou gloves on the table.

"What good will it do to set death on him like a dog? That is an awful power. That fellow I saw die; he's been out of the world two years. He wasn't ready to go quick that way. He'll be gone a long time."

Fenn tried vainly to mask his deadly sincerity.

"You are doing something you can never undo. No man has a right to do that."

Densmore cast a quick glance at the clock, gritted an oath and turned for his parka.

"You are not going out tonight."

There was a stab in Fenn's voice that pierced the frozen anger in which Densmore moved.

"It's too late tonight."

George indicated the clock.

"It was ten to eleven. I turned it back. It's slow. Do you understand, Bob? It is now exactly eleven-thirty."

A few seconds; half a minute; a minute; two; three; the hands of the clock dragged out an age.

Fenn could see the color creeping over Densmore's face; it reached his forehead.

"Too late."

Densmore's voice was a whisper.

"What's a few hours?" he grated. "This is my business. Who said it was too late? What will stop me?"

"*I'll* stop you. It *is* too late."

Fenn's voice was level, imperious.

"This is going to be my business tonight. I am your friend to the hilt, if you kill Stimpson or not, but you are not going to do it tonight."

A moment of swift clarity came to him.

"They tried to hold you, but you came for me. Now all —— can't stop me from paying you this once as I please."

Densmore stood near the wall beyond the window, his face working with emotion.

"Not tonight; I warned Stimpson," Fenn lied. "He won't be alone tonight."

There was a stir and rasp of the dry snow outside. Both listened.

In the long silence between them Fenn saw a leap of expression in Densmore as if a crazed beast within him had slipped its leash. His teeth flashed between his drawn lips. He was crouching. There was a swift pass of his hand, a sharp report, the sound of breaking glass, and Fenn sagged to the floor.

With the report Densmore straightened and brushed a hand before his eyes as if he were sweeping aside a curtain. He looked at the gun in his right hand. Shudderingly he flung it from him. The forty-four smashed and clattered in the broken pieces of the long-necked bottle, which had toppled from the table.

He stepped quickly to where Fenn lay;

stood a moment, then stooped over him. On his knees, both hands covering his face, his head went down and down until it rested on the inert form.

When he raised his head his face was colorless, pitiful, an agony of regret painted there.

He bent again and listened long for the heart-pulse. Quickly he opened Fenn's shirt. There was a trickle of red near the shoulder.

A confused murmur of voices interrupted. He listened. The quick shuffling of feet on the hard-packed snow before the door came to him, and a half-dozen men, led by Charlie the half-breed, pressed into the room.

An hour before, Charlie had come to them with the truth of Stimpson's claim-jumping. He was too much Indian to "lie every day and night too."

They had searched in vain for Stimpson. Coming toward the cabin, they had heard the shot and met Stimpson running toward town. Cowering, he stood between two of them near the door.

George Fenn sat up; his eyes opened wide. He moaned.

"Not tonight, Bob."

His voice was steady.

"It's all right," he added. "I am coming fine."

A smile parted on his lips.

On his feet, Densmore gazed wonderingly around the room. His eyes caught sight of a shattered pane of glass in the upper corner of the window.

Moving to the table, he picked the forty-four from the floor and broke it. He drew a shell from the cylinder. The primer was punctured true in the center. The shell had missed fire.

# YELLER JACK

by ROLF BENNETT

*Author of "The Barrier."*

IT WAS wet and foggy when Bill Grogan left the comparatively cozy picture house for the dark and slushy street. As he turned up the collar of his coat, Bill swore under his breath. Not that he minded the fog very much, or the damp or the darkness; he was pretty much at home in all three; but he just happened to be in the mood for swearing, and the weather afforded him a legitimate excuse.

The real cause of his annoyance was the pictures. The program that night had consisted almost entirely of sea dramas, in the course of which shipwrecked mariners and lovely girls had been cast away on uninhabited islands. Not that Bill objected to that part so much; in fact, he rather liked the idea; but it was the sea—so much of it—that had got on his nerves. As if he wanted pictures of the sea!

It was the very thing he wished to forget. He had been nearly all his life at sea and would be back on it again in a few days; he

"Yeller Jack," copyright, 1922, by Rolf Bennett.

didn't want it in the movies; there was quite enough of it in its proper place for him.

Digging his hands deep into his trousers pockets, Bill Grogan slouched along the mud-spattered sidewalk toward the boarding-house which was his temporary home. He was nearly there when he became aware of a soft pattering in his rear. Turning swiftly, he could see nothing; but, while he still stood peering, something rubbed against his leg.

Instinctively Bill kicked. His boot came into contact with some soft, resilient body, and there was a loud yelp that changed into a placating whine.

"Git, you cur!" exclaimed Bill; for, as already mentioned, he was in a bad temper.

His feelings somewhat relieved by this opportunity of active expression, Bill proceeded on his way, only to hear again the soft pattering behind him. Swinging round, he let out a fierce kick; but this time his boot smote the empty air, and he nearly landed on his back upon the slippery stones.

"If I git a hold on you, you dog-rotted mongrel, I'll knock the stuffin out o' you!" he shouted to the surrounding darkness.

He paused as if expecting some reply to his challenge, but as none came, not even a bark, continued on his way. But now his nerves were on edge, and his ears strained to catch the sound of the dog's stealthy padding; and the fact that this was so, added to his annoyance. Like most people, Bill Grogan hated the idea of being followed; but he hated still more not knowing whether or no he was being followed.

Therefore he stopped presently in the circle of light cast by a street lamp, that he might set this doubt at rest. Sure enough, when he looked round, there was the dog only a few yards behind him.

It was a sort of terrier—"sort of," because it was obviously a composite animal whose family tree must have embraced every known variety of mongrel. Its coat was short and wiry and of an uninviting yellow; its eyes, its best features, were large, brown and pathetic, and they were now fixed on Bill Grogan with an expression that was at once deprecatory, ingratiating and pleading.

"Say, where d'you come from?" demanded Bill.

The animal's long, plebeian tail, which had been dangling limply between its legs, stiffened and wagged vigorously.

"Heh?" growled Bill.

For all its roughness there was perhaps a kindly note in the voice. Anyway the mongrel came a step nearer, a hopeful gleam in its big eyes.

"What's your name, heh?"

Thus encouraged, the dog came still nearer and rubbed its nose against the toe of Bill's boot.

"Well, you ain't no beauty, not by long odds. 'Tain't that what's brought you to this," remarked Bill.

The dog accepted this statement in the spirit in which it was made, and pushed a cold wet muzzle into the man's hand.

"Guess you're hungry. That's your trouble, ain't it?" said Bill.

A warm tongue licked his hand caressingly. The psychological subtleties of life might escape Bill Grogan, but he was alive to its elemental necessities. He might not understand a broken heart, but he could sympathize with an empty stomach.

Close at hand stood a small restaurant, behind the steaming windows of which was displayed a variety of mysterious looking edibles. Bill entered, to return presently with a large bone.

"There you are, mate," he said, placing it on the ground before the dog.

He remained standing for a moment in the light of the street lamp, watching the famished mongrel attack the bone; then, buttoning up his coat again, trudged on into the fog. He had not gone many yards, however, when his ears once more caught the sound of the dog's padding. Infuriated, he turned and peered through the murk.

"You beat it!" he exclaimed. "Right now, or I'll land you one good and quick!"

He turned and went on, grumbling to himself. That bone had cost five cents. Not that he grudged the five cents, of course, but it seemed rank ingratitude on the animal's part that it should continue to follow him after such liberal hospitality.

Under the next lamp Bill paused once more and glanced back. Sure enough there was the dog a few yards away, the bone between its teeth.

"I'm done with you," said Bill Grogan in a voice of disgust. "I know your sort. You're a deadhead, that's what you are."

And with an air of finality he turned on his heel.

Next day Bill Grogan signed on as bosun of the *Adventurer*, bound for San Francisco that week. Having drawn a portion of his pay in advance, he returned to the boarding-house and there attired himself in festive garb prior to spending a pleasant time uptown. Scarcely had he set forth when, with a delighted yelp of recognition, the yellow-haired mongrel appeared from nowhere and began nosing his boots.

"Quit that, you mangy little swab!" roared Bill, his memory recalled to the incident of the previous night.

Thus rebuffed, the animal retreated a few yards, and, squatting on its haunches, steadily regarded Bill Grogan. Bill Grogan as steadily returned its gaze.

"Don't you take me for a pal of yours, because I ain't," he said emphatically. "You're the dirtiest, mangiest, yeller-skinned skunk of a dog that ever I set eyes on. That's what you are, see?"

As if bored by such commonplace abuse, the mongrel yawned. This insult, for it could scarcely be regarded in any other light, made Bill so angry that he strode forward with the intention of delivering a kick which would once and for all remove any misplaced notions of friendship from the dog's mind.

Contrary to his expectations, the animal did not stir but sat there upon its haunches, its large brown eyes fixed upon him with a calm assurance that absolutely shook Bill's nerve. His foot, raised to administer correction, dropped back of itself and he confessed himself beaten.

"See here," he said conciliatingly, "you quit follerin' me and when I come back I'll buy you a supper. Ain't that a square deal now?"

The long, dejected tail stiffened and dusted the sidewalk vigorously; and, taking this as a sign that the proposition had been accepted, Bill Grogan continued on his way. He looked round once, and—such is human nature—was almost disappointed to see the dog still squatting on the sidewalk apparently engrossed in the performance of certain rudimentary ablutions.

It was some hours later and quite dark when Bill Grogan returned that way. He had spent an exceedingly pleasant, if not very profitable, evening, in the course of which he had imbibed a considerable quantity of prohibited refreshment. With his voice raised in song, Bill Grogan navigated the sidewalk none too steadily, and on reaching a street lamp was fain to lean against it for support.

It was at this moment that two men suddenly pounced upon him out of the surrounding darkness. While one caught him round the neck and held a hand over his mouth to prevent his calling out, the other prepared to go swiftly through his pockets.

Just then, however, two rows of sharp, canine teeth buried themselves in the ruffian's leg. With a howl of pain he sprang away, and as he did so Bill Grogan, sobered by the attack, wrenched himself free from the other man's grasp and dealt him a blow that sent him reeling to the ground.

The yellow dog, for it was he, was still hanging on to his victim; but, seeing that Bill Grogan had freed himself from the other's grip, he let go the leg to which he had been tenaciously clinging and barked with joy. Then as the two toughs made off into the shadows he cringed, humble with the humility of all the starved and beaten curs in his ancestry, to the feet of the man he had adopted as master.

"Darned if it ain't the yeller pup!" exclaimed Bill Grogan as his canine rescuer paused, tentatively wagging his absurd tail. "And I promised you a supper, didn't I? Well, you shall have the best bone I can get, mate."

Close at hand was the small restaurant he had patronized on the previous night; and, going in, he returned with a bone—a ham knuckle, sweet and juicy—and laid it at the mongrel's feet.

"Maybe I've treated you kind o' shabby," he said apologetically. "But you're a white man, though you got a yeller hide."

As a token of esteem he patted the large, ungainly head.

THE *Adventurer* had dropped the fussy little tug which had towed her out of harbor, and with all sails drawing was swinging down the Jersey coast before a freshening southeasterly breeze. The mate, standing on the poop, was superintending the setting of the top-gallant sails. He was a big man with a face the color of mahogany, fists like lumps of teak and a voice calculated to outbellow the Bull of Bashan.

"Lay out on them yards smart, you dead, crawlin' critters!" he yelled to the men aloft;

and they, with the fear of the Lord upon them, cast off the gaskets at top speed.

Then, as one of the men at the weather-earrings appeared to be bungling his job, the mate hailed him.

"Hi, you wooden-fisted slouch at the main t'gallant, I'll come and I'll——"

The residue of his eloquence was lost; for at that moment something soft and wet and cold rubbed itself against his hand, and the mate nearly jumped a foot off the deck.

"What in ——!" he cried; and then his gaze fell on a thin, frightened-looking animal with large brown eyes and a dirty yellow coat.

"Where in blazes did you come from?" he roared, and at the same time raised his boot.

But the dog, knowing from long experience what to expect, adroitly dodged aside, and the mate delivered a ferocious kick on the poop-rail, severely stubbing his toes and in nowise improving his temper.

"Bosun, how in thunder did that mangy mongrel get aboard?" he demanded.

Bill Grogan, who was Flemish-coiling a rope just beneath the poop, looked up with an expression of innocent surprize.

Guess he must have follered one of the men aboard, sir," he replied.

"Well, heave the beast overboard."

Bill looked at the dog, who, with its tail dangling limply between its legs, had sought refuge under the poop-ladder.

"Not me, sir," he answered. "I ain't no animal-tamer; and he bites."

"The brute ain't spirit enough to bite."

But Bill Grogan shook his head.

"I got a widdered mother dependent on me," he said. "I ain't going to take no risks of catching hydrophobia."

At that dread word the mate shuddered. He had once witnessed the death of a man bitten by a mad dog and the spectacle had never ceased to haunt him. He looked at the trembling cur under the ladder and his courage failed; he dared not lay hands on it.

But when the men came down from aloft he called to one of them and ordered him to secure the animal. The man was about to obey when he caught a surreptitious wink from Bill Grogan.

"I ain't used to handling animals, sir," he told the mate.

"Goshamighty!" bellowed the latter. "Are you scared of that doggoned little cur as well?"

"He's fierce, sir. Flew at the cook's mate not long ago and nearly got him by the throat. He ain't over it yet."

The mate, with an oath of disgust, turned away. As soon as he had disappeared, Bill Grogan gave a low whistle and the mongrel came to him, squirming in an ecstasy of devotion.

"Not what you might call handsome," remarked the man who had related the dramatic escape of the cook's mate.

"He sure is not, Jim, I allow that," admitted the bosun, "but he got me out of a tight corner the other night—didn't you, you yeller-hided little rat?"

Thus affectionately addressed, the dog undulated with delight until it seemed that the usual order of procedure had been reversed, and that the tail was wagging the dog. Bill Grogan related briefly his adventure with the two toughs. The story quickly went the round of the fo'csle, and it was unanimously agreed that "Yeller Jack," as some facetious person aptly christened the mongrel, should remain on board in spite of the mate.

So, having learned of the mate's weakness, they invented stories of Yeller Jack's savage and revengeful disposition, and this in spite of the fact that he went in abject terror of Gladys, the ship's cat, and indeed seemed to live in a perpetual state of shivering fright. But apart from Gladys, who soon disdained even to look at him, Yeller Jack's only enemy was the mate.

Not that the dog's life aboard the *Adventurer* became a bed of roses; it did not. Men's tempers vary, and often it is a great relief to plant a hearty, if unprovoked, kick on the carcass of something animate and unresisting. On such occasions Yeller Jack's squeals brought balm to the ruffled spirits of his aggressor, who found further satisfaction in hurling abuse at his victim for getting in the way of the kick, for such is human nature.

The cook, a man with a grievance and a hasty temper, found an outlet for his pent-up feelings by flinging anything handy from a kettle-lid to a frying-pan, at the long-suffering animal whenever it was misguided enough to come within range of the galley. A lucky hit, succeeded by the yelps of the victim as he fled, afforded the cook vast consolation and made him almost good-humored for the rest of the day.

The captain, whenever he found Yeller

Jack curled up in some sunny spot on the poop, forgot his dignity in the sheer joy of booting him off, as did the mates when fortune favored them in a similar manner.

Yet no one was really cruel to the mongrel, or intended to be so. It was just his evil star which ordained that he should invariably be in range of somebody's boot when that particular somebody felt the need of kicking something.

He became, in fact, a sort of scape-goat, having thrust upon him the grievances, complaints and sins of the whole ship's company, whereby all, save he, were benefited and solaced. If a man upset a pot of paint, if the cook had a mishap in the galley, if the carpenter lost a tool, if the bosun found a leaky oil drum in his locker, it was ascribed directly or indirectly to Yeller Jack, and satisfaction exacted.

THE *Adventurer* had been driving south for about a fortnight when the weather suddenly changed. The southeasterly wind which had held since she left port, rapidly developed into a heavy gale, and within an hour the ship was staggering along under close-reefed main and forecourse and jib, while the seas broke over her weather bow and deluged the decks. Throughout that night the gale increased in violence, and when day dawned it was blowing a hurricane, the forecourse had been torn to ribbons and the jib down-haul carried away.

It was about this time that the carpenter, who had been taking soundings, reported a leak. The pumps were manned, only to become choked within half an hour.

When they were eventually cleared, the water was rising in the hold; and, to try to cope with it, throughout the day and the whole of the succeeding night the crew worked the pumps in shifts. Yet in spite of heroic efforts when dawn broke again the ship was beginning to wallow with that flat, heavy motion that every seaman recognizes and dreads.

All efforts to locate the leak had failed, and by sun-up it became certain that nothing could save the vessel.

"Mr. Burgess," said the captain, addressing the first mate, "look to the boats and see that they're properly provisioned."

The mate turned to the men, who were still working at the pumps.

"Hi, you gang of grouchers, stand by the boats. Bosun, see that all the falls are clear."

With much profanity, but with no trace of panic, the men did as ordered, and the boats were got ready for launching. Yet with the ship wallowing like a water-logged cask while heavy seas broke over her, the task of getting the boats away was extremely difficult; and the first one was smashed before she left the falls.

"Broach an oil-drum, Mr. Burgess!" shouted the captain above the roar of the gale.

This was done; and after the oil had been flowing freely for several minutes, the second boat was safely launched. The third followed, containing the captain with the ship's papers and navigating instruments.

"By gum, she's going!" cried a man in one of the boats.

It was true; they had not abandoned her a moment too soon; for, even as they looked, the *Adventurer* canted over to leeward and then slowly disappeared beneath the waves. It was soon after this that Bill Grogan, who was in the mate's boat, inquired if any one had seen Yeller Jack. No one had apparently, and it was concluded that he had gone down with the ship.

"A mighty good thing, too," remarked the mate. "That dog was unlucky, a blamed Jonah; that's what he was."

Not long afterward one of the men at the oars, in trying to get a better grip of the stretcher with his feet, trod on something soft. There was a shrill yelp, and the head of Yeller Jack suddenly appeared above the thwarts.

"—— and blisters!" ejaculated the mate. "The darn critter's right here. Overboard with it, one of you."

"Wouldn't do that if I were you, sir," said one of the men. "We may want him if the grub gives out before we're picked up."

A laugh went up at this, accompanied by several unkind criticisms concerning the nutritive qualities of Yeller Jack. There for the time being the matter rested, and the dog was allowed to remain peacefully under the thwarts.

During the night the violence of the storm abated, but left a heavy sea running which tried to the utmost the weary men at the oars. It grew calmer, however, and by the next morning there was not so much as a puff of wind, while a thin haze, indicative of heat, lay over the water.

All this time the boats had managed to keep within hailing-distance of each other but though a strict lookout had been kept in each no vessel had been sighted. Things soon began to look black, for the loss of the first boat and consequent overmanning of the remaining two had meant a heavier call on the provisions and water.

Nevertheless, even on short rations, those who were in the mate's boat managed to keep cheerful; and many were the jokes made concerning the possible tragic end of Yeller Jack.

"Be sure you keep an eye on him, bosun," some one would remark. "He's the fatted calf."

"I'll trade my share of Yeller for a pair of old boots," grinned another. "My teeth ain't what they was, and I can't chew nothin' tougher than cowhide."

"I'll give you mine," laughed Bill Grogan. "I ain't that squeamish."

Soon, however, it became necessary still further to reduce rations all round. The men ceased to chaff one another about Yeller Jack, and it was noticeable that each one religiously saved a portion of his biscuit for the dog, a display of generosity and self-sacrifice that would have been touching but for the grim ulterior motive that lay behind it.

At last, despite the most rigid economy, the food and water gave out, and the castaways were faced with the prospect of death from starvation and thirst. A blazing sun added to their torment; and, too weary and disheartened to pull at the oars, they lay for the most part upon the thwarts in a state of semi-stupor. It was the mate who, one evening when the climax of suffering seemed to have been reached, voiced a proposal which had long been in the minds of all.

"That stinkin' cur. I guess we'll have to kill him. Maybe he'll keep us alive a bit longer."

"He's got as much right to live as us," growled Bill Grogan.

"You shet up," said some one. "Our lives are more valuable than that mongrel's. He's got to go."

"Aye, aye," murmured the others.

"Let any one try it," said Bill Grogan defiantly. "The first man who touches Yeller will get my knife between his ribs."

There was a silence; but it was a silence full of menace. The men regarded the dog as theirs; for had they not given him of their own scanty fare in order that, when the necessity arose, he might stave off the impending shadow of death? It was due to them that he was fat and well fed while they were starving. Presently a man spoke, and there was a strange snarl in his voice.

"We're going to kill that dog; we ain't going to sacrifice our lives for a brute beast. And if you pull your knife, bosun, some of us will pull ourn."

This statement called forth a growl of approval from the rest. Bill Grogan said nothing; there was nothing to say. But just at this crisis the mate spoke.

"Hang on a while, boys," he said. "Remember, when the dog's gone we'll have nothing left but our boots. Wait till the morning, and then if everybody's of the same opinion we kill that pup."

Two or three men were against the delay; but the majority sided with the mate, and thus Yeller Jack was accorded a brief respite. Presently a dense fog rolled up and lay upon the water.

It was so thick that the men in the two boats lost sight of one another and drifted along silently and unseen in the ghostly gloom.

Bill Grogan, lying with the dog curled up against his breast, silently accepted the inevitable. The others were right; men's lives were more precious than a dog's, and Yeller Jack would have to be sacrificed. In any case he was powerless to prevent it; the odds against him were too many. Awkwardly, half-ashamed of his own weakness, he fondled the dog's long, silky ears and submitted to having his hand caressed by the warm, rough tongue.

"You and me's got to part, old son," he whispered. "I done my best for you, but I'm ruled out."

At last, like the others, he sank into a sleep that was almost stupor and lay like a log until awakened by the loud and insistent barking of the dog.

"Shut up, you little fool!" he grated.

But the barking had awakened the others, and low curses were directed at Yeller Jack for having thus aroused them from a merciful oblivion.

"Kill that darned brute and have done with it," growled the mate.

"You bonehead, you done for yourself now," whispered Bill as he groped desperately for the dog's head.

Having found it, he held Yeller Jack's

mouth firmly shut, and there was silence; silence, but not stillness, for the animal struggled like a mad thing to be free and give tongue. Seeking in his mind for the cause of Yeller Jack's mad excitement, a sudden thought came to Bill Grogan; and, still holding the nearly frantic animal, he listened. Faintly across the water, deadened by the fog, came a sound which set his heart beating wildly.

"Listen!" he said hoarsely.

Startled by something in his voice, the men ceased to mutter and stir.

"Hear that?" he demanded exultantly.

Through the blackness came the unmistakable sound of creaking blocks and tackle, and the swish of water as it was thrust aside by the bows of an oncoming ship.

"By the living, it's a ship!" came a hoarse whisper, and some one tried to shout.

But throats were too parched for shouting; and only a thin, voiceless murmur rose from the boat.

"Bark, you little swine; bark!" whispered Bill Grogan, releasing the dog's jaws.

Quivering with excitement, the dog barked his challenge through the fog and presently a voice hailed them.

"Ahoy there!"

Again men tried to shout; and, finding they could not, groaned curses.

"Bark, bark like blazes!" Bill prompted huskily, and the dog obeyed him.

"Ahoy there! Where away?" came the voice again through the fog; and this time it seemed right on top of them.

"Ship ahoy! We're in open boats," answered the mate; and his voice, though weak and hoarse, reached the other.

"Watch out!" roared the unseen; and presently they heard the tramp of feet and rattle of gear as the invisible ship was brought up in the wind.

Then, through the murk, they caught the faint glimmer of a light and weakly pulled toward it. Soon they were alongside a large sailing-vessel; and willing hands helped them aboard, while flares were lighted to guide the other boat to the rescuer.

It was rather more than twelve hours later that Bill Grogan, somewhat recovered but still weak, found his way on deck. The first person he encountered was Mr. Burgess, the mate, reclining in a deck-chair.

"See here, bosun," said the mate, "I want to take back all I ever said about that hound of yours. I reckon he saved our lives. We'd have gone on sleeping like logs and let this ship go past if he hadn't smelt it through the fog."

Bill Grogan beamed like a mother hearing praise of her first-born. Then his eye wandered round the deck.

"I wonder where the little swab's got to?" he said. "I know he came aboard, for I carried him myself."

He whistled, but there was no response.

"Surely nothing can't have happened to him," he muttered with misgiving.

"Not it," said the mate scornfully. "There's too many kinds of dog in him; his sort don't die easy."

But Bill Grogan was not reassured.

"I'd hate to lose the pup; he's been a proper pal to me," he said plaintively.

The mate was about to utter something disparaging to the dog if comforting to the man, but changed his mind on seeing that Bill Grogan had departed in search of the animal. Up and down ranged the bosun, whistling into dark corners, his uneasiness increasing each moment and the gloom on his brow marking him out from his fellows as a man with a sorrow.

It was not until his search led him past the galley that he became as other men again, for it was there that he heard the familiar sound of breaking crockery, and a string of lurid curses directed at something that was apparently the son of its mother, but not of its father.

Bill Grogan waited in happy certainty for the sequel. In the fraction of a second it came—a pained yelp, a saucepan-lid and a flash of tawny yellow through the galley doorway.

# THE LAND of OPHIR

*A THREE-PART STORY PART II*

*by*

**CHARLES BEADLE**

*Author of "The Double Scoop," "The Singing Monkey," etc.*

***The first part of the story briefly retold in story form***

ABOUT the first adventure I can remember was with Fraser H. Thorpe, back in early school-days. It lasted sixteen rounds, and left me with a feeling of permanent disgrace—because I'd thought of Frazer as a sissy, a student, a bug-chaser, and not good for anything except hunting beetles. And that shows how wrong a man can be!

My name's Tromp, by the way.

What he did in the world I don't know. My luck took me with other men. And the prince of them was Billy Langster, one of the wildest who ever hit the Barbary Coast. But Billy disappeared—to become respectable, I understood; while I found myself trekking through the big thirsts in Africa with an Africander named Ollendorff.

We wandered all over the shop from Bulawayo to the Nile, where old Ollendorff kicked in—or, rather, was gored out by a buffalo. The last I recall of Ollendorff was when we ran into the *safari* of a Levantine who called himself Gandy, somewhere northwest of Lake Albert Edward. Gandy was beating up a woman with a *sjambok*; so we beat him up instead—and left him cursing us in languages we couldn't recognize and could treat with contempt.

The Mahdi got me shortly after this and kept me in a cage for a couple of years, dangling from dromedaries' backs in the eastern Sudan.

When I got free I settled down—and, to make quite sure, I got married.

Fate dealt me another hand a few years later, when I found myself a widower, alone, smoking a pipe in the lobby of a New York hotel. One night I went down into the old Tenderloin looking for some excitement with Hardwicke, a young Englishman I'd picked up in Mexico. And we found it. When the fight was over, Hardwicke—between drink and gratitude—spilled the beans about an expedition that was on foot for Africa.

Right away I horned in, and he introduced me to the leader. I took one look and recognized him.

"Billy!"

So old Billy Langster gave me the dope first hand. He'd been about everywhere! New York, East Africa—where he was very nearly scuppered by a gang who first worshiped him and then wanted to eat him—China, Peru, Brazil, and Africa again—Morocco, to be exact, where he tried his hand at making sultans.

This sultan business naturally brought him up with fat Johnny Starleton. Every one knows Starleton—he really *does* make sultans! Through Starleton, Billy met another regular fellow, Fieldmorre, an impecunious Irish viscount, who had a hunch of his own.

Between them they'd got hold of Sabah, a Syrian who had gone in with a syndicate some years before to exploit the territory back of Juby, just south of the Spanish line on the West Coast where the Sûs ends in the sea.

The syndicate had gone on the bum when an assistant funked his job, and the local sheik was made to pay damages by a British gunboat. But there were rich pickings there; and Fieldmorre took up where the old syndicate ended.

With Sabah he went inland and visited the Shareef Ma-el-Einen, ruler of the entire district. They made friends with the *shareef* and a Frenchman, Captain Vèron, who butted in while on an exploring-trip from Senegal.

Vèron warned them it was sure death to go farther inland; told of atrocities—missing men—and so forth. The latest relic was the journal of a man who had gone in and not come out. Vèron had got the book from a coast Fantee.

Well, when Billy gave me that line, I grinned.

"All right, you —— cynic," said he; and he produced the diary.

This diary-writing adventurer gave a pretty straight account of hitting inland to Nsonnafo's village; and from there on until he struck a city of "oriental magnificence" and met the sultan. Then he began to gibber about subphratries of the Snake Society—and sacrifices—and that was all. The account ended right there. It was ——

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interesting, but not conclusive. I turned the book over in my hand—and a name almost slapped me in the face:

FRASER HALDE THORPE

I told Billy, without any more palaver, that I was good for $20,000 for my share in the expedition. Where Frazy had gone I'd go!

We recruited our whites from men we'd known, and arranged for them to meet us at Funchal and Las Palmas, where we picked them up some months later on our own schooner, *Penguin*, and sailed for Juby.

But in Las Palmas we had a farewell rough-house when our men got in a row that brought us the acquaintance of Baron Bertouche—known to the masses as Sid-el-Keleeb, a man who sponged on the whole world until he met Fieldmorre, who came near kicking him overboard.

Well, when we reached Juby we found all hands present, except Vèron, who sent a message that he would overtake us.

Ten days later then, two hundred and fifty strong—one hundred of these being fighting Hausas trained by ourselves at the butts with rifle and machine gun—we hit the long trail.

We found Ma-el-Einen all right, polite enough in his walled town, but kind of sore at us going any further. Sabah, too, suddenly began to balk and get sullen for no reason we could see. And we got our first taste of the real desert when we picked up a dervish—a dirty, snake-swallowing, shrieking, blasphemous dervish—who gave our Hausas (half of 'em were Mohammedans; half were rank pagan) a real thrill.

After we'd gone about five days' march into the desert sickness began to break out. First it hit the dromedaries. Then the men caught it. When they began to cash in, the Hausas showed signs of funk. We couldn't figure it out. One day as I was talking it over with Fieldmorre a spasm took him and myself at the same moment.

"Fieldy," said I, "we've both got it."

We loaded up immediately with laudanum; and the next thing I remembered— Oh, ——, I don't remember anything.

We came to ten days later in wicker baskets slung from dromedaries.

The caravan was still intact.

Vèron had succeeded in joining us, after escaping from Tuaregs. If he hadn't joined us, —— knows what would have happened. He caught on right away that the dervish had been slowly poisoning the whole outfit, and punching holes in the water-skins.

"What ——" I began.

"Shot 'm—*pronto*," says Billy.

But that didn't seem to settle things either, because he had put the fear of —— into the lot of the men. The morale was kind of shaken. Irritation and complaining began to break out. We all got the infection.

Some of us believed Vèron was double-crossing us in the interests of France; others thought Sabah's actions suspicious; and an undercurrent of resentment was soon threatening to disrupt us. Only one thing could have saved us. And it happened.

Camp was jumped at dawn by a whirlwind of Tuaregs.

We fell back into square and gave 'em ——, beating them off after a good sharp scrap.

We knew now our Hausas could fight!

But we knew, too— and every passing hour confirmed it—that the unknown reaches before us held unguessed dangers and swarmed with terrible fighters.

And I couldn't forget the Mahdi!

## VIII

IN THE morning there was no sign of the Tuareg. We hit the trail as early as possible, we whites taking it in turn to walk, as the wounded required some of the dromedaries.

Naturally, going through the district where Thorpe had had such a bad time, his diary occupied much of our attention. Although he had approached from the Senegal side, that is from the southwest, and we were coming in from practically due west, there was no doubt, to judge by the formation, that these hills were the same. Profiting by his experience, we had filled up every waterskin we could carry and placed every one on half-rations.

By a kind of mutual consent, each feeling that the action had wounded any rifts there might be—at any rate among the Hausa—we did not mention the subject of any possible dissension, although I guessed there was pretty hard thinking going on. I for one couldn't forget Hardwicke's point of view regarding Vèron, and utterly failed to reconcile a French officer being in on such a filibustering outfit. Of course it might be so. And Sabah, too—who had had a finger chopped off, which didn't seem to please him any—seemed as sulky as before.

The most cheering thing I noticed was that our Hausa appeared in excellent spirits, jabbering their heads off, each man in his fashion relating the prodigies he had performed. The heat, hit up by the refraction from the rocks as Thorpe had mentioned, surely was fierce. Seeger, the doc, was kept pretty busy with his wounded, although none of them, except two Hausa who died the following day, had been very seriously injured.

Naturally we kept double sentries out, prepared for any attack at any time, but the Tuareg seemed to have quit for good. I remarked that Fieldmorre was doing a lot of chin-wagging with Vèron, and purposely left them alone.

The more I tried to figure things out, the more balled up I got; for it seemed, on

further reflection, that had he been a French spy he, knowing from the beginning what was on the cards, would have had a French war-ship or British—as the two were in accord at the moment over the Morocco and allied questions—at Juby to chase us off. I decided that Hardwicke was talking bunk and tried to dismiss the subject from my mind.

Dromedaries just hate marching on stone as much as a cat hates walking in the rain, and they showed signs of getting sore feet. We reckoned that we were traveling faster than Thorpe had been able to do, for he had had porters heavily laden. Two days later I began, as Thorpe had done, watching those infernal hills as he had called them, and wondering when they were going to end.

Our scouts found no sign nor sight of any of our late friends, and we were disposed to think that, in spite of their unusual numbers, they must have been an extra big gang just after loot in the customary way. The following afternoon, toward sunset, the hills began to peter out and we saw ahead the plateau of shale and sand which had pretty nigh done for Thorpe.

Late that night—that is, for camp-life—as we were sitting around the fire discussing matters, my ears, which are pretty acute, caught a queer sound. At first I thought I was imagining things.

"D'you hear that, you fellows?" I asked.

We all listened intently. Faintly but distinctly came a distant cry sounding half-human. We all had heard it. The night was starry but dark. Again it came and seemed chopped off. This time we located the direction unanimously.

"Who's in charge of the picket to the west?" inquired Fieldmorre.

"Pexton," said I, and hailed him. "D'you hear that cry out in the desert?" I asked.

He listened. After a moment it came again.

"Indeed I do," he replied. "What would you be thinking it is?"

"That's what we're wondering. Say, just go out and see if your fellows have spotted anything."

"Half a second," said Billy. "I'm orderly officer tonight. May as well do the rounds now. Come along."

The pair padded off into the night and we sat listening for the recurrence of the strange cry, which happened several times.

"*C'est un être humain*," exclaimed Vèron with conviction.

"Certainly doesn't sound like a jackal, and I can't for the life of me think what else it could be," commented Fieldmorre.

Presently we heard Billy's and Paxton's voices on the still hot air. Then we saw the flash of a torch and dim figures making their way across the open. For some time the cry was not repeated. At last it came again, just as the distant light had been smothered by a rise in the sandy soil and shale.

At length into the light about us stalked Paxton and Billy, and behind them a big Hausa carrying on his shoulders what seemed at first sight to be the corpse of our late friend the marabout.*

"What is it?" demanded Fieldmorre.

"Dunno," replied Billy. "Seems crazy or dying. Don't know which."

The Hausa dumped the man by the side of the fire. He was an elderly native with a white beard and mustache, not negroid, but rather the Fulani-Berber type. His robe was old and patched and moreover nearly in rags. He moaned loudly as he lay in a crumpled heap, and we recognized the mysterious cry from the desert.

We called Seeger. He thought that the fellow seemed pegging out from exhaustion His body was badly nourished, as the newspapers say.

"Give him a shot of something to pull him together," suggested Billy. "Perhaps he'll be able to talk."

At the prick of the needle the old man started visibly, but his eyes didn't open. Seeger bent down and lifted his lids and flashed a torch.

"The son of a gun's playing 'possum, I believe," he said.

"Give him a swig of whisky," suggested Barnard. "That'll bring him back from——."

Barnard was more or less right, for the old guy spluttered at the first taste and then spat it out vigorously, raising a laugh from us all. He sat up after that. I guess the doc's dope began to work too. For his eyes looked good and bright as he stared around at the group of whites. Probably he'd never seen so many in all his life.

Vèron butted in and began talking. He replied in a dialect of Arabic, thanking Allah for his merciful rescue with variations.

"Who art thou and whence comest thou,

*A Mohammedan holy man.

O my father?" interrupted Fieldmorre, taking the lead. The old fellow blinked at the circle of watching eyes.

"Who are ye?" he retorted to the speaker. "And what do ye here in the land of thirst?"

"Blast his cheek!" muttered Barnard.

"We travel from the west into the east, O my father," replied Fieldmorre quietly. "How camest thou in this sorry plight?"

"I was traveling from the tents of the Ibn Badwahi to the Fahamwata, when my camel was stricken and died. My feet are old and feeble, and I fell by the wayside. But Allah is All Merciful, Knowing, Compassionate, Wise!"

"Where are the bones of thy beast?" butted in Vèron again.

"Nigh unto five days' marching for an old man, to the south."

"Are there wells nigh to here, O my father?" queried Fieldmorre.

"To the north, for seven swift days; to the east none for ten fast days," replied the old man.

"Glory!" I murmured. "Ten days!"

And I hoped to —— he was lying.

"Give me to rest, O white man, for I am feeble."

"You'd better look after him, doc," said Fieldmorre. "He certainly looks bad."

They carried him off to the Hausa quarters, and Seeger went to look after him. The remainder of us tried to figure out who and what he was. His yarn seemed plausible enough to me, and Fieldmorre and Billy agreed. But Vèron wouldn't have it; nor Barnard. The former jabbered away to Fieldmorre, venting strong views on the subject which made me think—

"The fellow can't be a French traitor, otherwise he'd be only too darned glad to see the expedition wiped out, as long as he got away."

I ALWAYS keep my eyes skinned, so that during the next day's march I didn't fail to notice several things: Seeger cussing, but quite harmlessly, at having another patient wished on to him, when, as it was, the transport was overtaxed; Hibbert and Famitty arguing again, the former insisting that we ought to have shot this blighter as we had the other; and among the Hausa was a distinct return to the factional disputes between Mohammedans and pagans.

Sabah, if it were possible, seemed more depressed than ever. I tried to talk to him, but all I could get were monosyllables and a dreary statement that he was sick.

"How?" said I; but he wouldn't or couldn't explain.

As we trudged on in silence—for I was doing my spell on the road—he remarked plaintively that he'd known Fieldmorre for ten years.

"What's the trouble about that?" I demanded. "Nothing to grumble for, is there?"

He mumbled something unintelligible and refused to explain.

"Maybe he's sickening up for something," thought I, and wandered off into vague speculations as to what kind of guy the sultan of these people whom we were out to get would turn out to be. Surely a fanatical Mohammedan; probably Berber or Fulani.

Next morning, as we were drinking our allowance of coffee and at the moment talking vaguely about how long Thorpe's desert, as we had named it, would last, there came a sudden rifle-shot. As we sprang for our guns, yelling orders to the men, there followed an outburst of erratic rifle-fire, far too much for any single picket. As we looked we saw the sun-gleams of the lances of a bunch of horsemen sweep up and right over the forms of the picket. Looking to the west, I beheld another party riding like the —— past the picket. As I was wondering why they did not fire, the truth struck me. Hardwicke, standing near me, had seen it and bawled out—

"By ——, we're betrayed!"

"Shut your head," I shouted angrily, knowing that that was the quickest road to start a panic.

"Each man take a machine," yelled Fieldmorre, for we had all seen it, "and shoot the first man who tries to bolt."

Again Vèron was one of the first on the job—Lordy, he was some soldier! The sergeant in charge of his section was a Mohammedan and had the Maxim already mounted; he tried deliberately to swing it upon us. Vèron shot him, and, seizing the gun, opened her on the bunch drawing down on us.

Meanwhile Fieldmorre, Billy and I and the others—the boys were mighty quick to tumble—ran to the guns, shooting when necessary. Sudden scraps started up between our own people.

Several of the drivers attempted to turn the beasts loose. Five got away, trailing

across the desert, three of them with wounded yelling and sticking their heads from their baskets.

My bunch fortunately remained loyal, so that while the sergeant was busy with the Maxim, I was free to look at other things. I had a vision of Casey slashing right and left with a rifle-butt on the men who had turned upon him, and on the other side our painter-botanist using two guns. Hardwicke's section I saw was sticking; and, shouting to him to help Casey, I ran to Paxton's assistance.

In the middle of the scrap, just as we had got some of them under—many quit cold and bolted—and I was busy with two of 'em, the charging bunch hit us. I don't know—nor does Billy nor Fieldmorre, for it was such a —— of a mix-up—but I think they rode through us twice. One thing I do know was that more than once I kind of whispered to myself—

"This is the end of the trail, boy; but make it expensive."

The first breathing-space I had I naturally thought of my own section and had a chance to look around. The rattle and clatter of the machines and the erratic volleys were reassuring. Circling around us were the Tuareg gang yelling like fiends and firing from the saddle. Scattered between us were forms lying stiff on the shale and others running as if the great Mogul were after them. Fieldmorre was working a gun himself. Billy was, as well.

On the other side, Hardwicke was busy with Casey's machine—whose figure I couldn't find, nor O'Donnell's. Broughton I saw lying on his face not far from me. Some of the dromedaries, mostly pack-beasts, were kneeling in the square, with a dozen drivers and camp-followers huddled beside them, with Doc Seeger standing over them with two guns. I tried swiftly to count up how many of our Hausa had stuck—about half, I reckoned in a hurried glance as I ran to a machine gun I'd spotted silent.

The gun had belonged to Poliszkwi, whose gang had turned on him, tried to drag the gun with them and evidently abandoned it some ten yards from the camp. There were five dead Hausa, and Poliszkwi among them, surrounding the overturned machine. As I righted her and got her into action the circling Tuareg suddenly began to ride off, and as they got out of range, the "cease fire" was sounded by the Hausa trumpeter, one of the faithful.

Within a few minutes, when they seemed a safe distance away, I left my post and went to meet Billy and Fieldmorre. The former I noticed had a loose arm dangling, and the latter walked with a limp.

"Some scrap," commented Billy, with a twisted grin.

"It sure was," said I, and, glancing around, "but where's Vèron?" I asked.

"*Me voici, mon vieux,*" responded a voice, as from behind me appeared Vèron.

His embroidered tunic or Moorish vest of scarlet, which he sported, was literally drenched and caked with blood, and a torn piece of his *jelab* was around his head, also dark brown. "*Sacrē nom!*" he added, grinning at Fieldmorre as he drew a crumpled cigaret from his *skarrah.* "*Nous avons la veine, mes gars!*" (We've got the luck, fellows.)

Behind him came Peters, staggering.

"Barnard ban gone," he stated, his eyes smoldering with berserker rage.

"Say," said I, "I guess you fellows had better stick it out, for they may start another rough-house any moment."

"Yes," agreed Fieldmorre, fumbling with his pipe. "Will you, Peters, go and get some men and assist the doctor to bring in the wounded? Will you go round and make out our casualty list, Tromp? Thanks. William, if you——"

I went off *pronto* cursing the man because I reckoned he'd probably apologize to the devil for yanking him out of ——. Poliszkwi was stone dead; also Casey, his Irish face scarcely recognizable. Barnard and Broughton had been shot in the back. Poiteau was seriously wounded; Peters had a lance through his stomach; Hardwicke, Famitty and Sabah, besides Billy, Fieldmorre and Vèron were slightly wounded. I hadn't got a scratch. Of the loyal Hausa eleven were dead and nine wounded.

The only wonder was that they hadn't wiped us out. There was quite a bunch of those renegade Hausa who hadn't got away, but that wasn't much consolation. That is, out of seventeen whites, five were put out of mess and two seriously wounded; of the Hausa, at a rough estimate I reckoned there weren't more than seventy left fit for duty. I reported to Fieldmorre and Billy. A fine bunch to tackle a powerful tribe with. The only thing left to do was to

stand fast to see what the Tuareg were up to, and bury the dead.

By the time the latter dismal job was half-way through we had discovered something else; the dying old man whom we had rescued had disappeared. If he'd been playing 'possum he'd got away during the general scrimmage; if not, Allah must have guided his darned beast among those which bolted. But that wasn't the worst—every waterskin in the camp had been slit.

## IX

HOW had the marabout fixed it? Seeger was sure that the man now had been in a pretty bad state; seemed impossible with everybody around that he could have gone about hacking the waterskins.

Naturally we suspected the drivers themselves. A few were missing. But if so, why hadn't they done it before? However, it was useless to waste time guessing.

Naturally at the first discovery the doc, who had spotted it, had shouted for assistance, and we had done our best to save what remained—about half a skinful for a hundred odd men, and according to the marabout ten days from water; that was, if we went on.

We held a general council. Sabah was the only energetic voice who struck. Certain death for all if we continued on, he insisted; and moreover, taking Fieldmorre aside, he pleaded with him to go back.

"Don't understand it," Fieldmorre commented afterward. "Used to be as plucky as the ——; seems to have lost his nerve absolutely."

Several didn't say anything at all, but the rest of us were for the attempt.

"I'm for seeing it through—to the limit," as Billy put it. "What's the use of sacrificing those fellows if we were going to give in now? We ought to have figured that out before."

In the late afternoon the Tuareg came on again; but this time there was no treachery in the camp, and we were in square, ready for them. They made one rapid charge as if to try us out, and then retired and started racing around just within rifle-shot, as if to kid us into throwing away ammunition, until almost sundown. Evidently they were camping not far away. Billy put up a wild scheme to make a night sally, but we vetoed this, in spite of the temptation of possible punishment we might inflict, because of their number and the fact that they might be smart enough to ride around, wipe out the camp and have us isolated in the desert.

Vèron it was who suggested a night march. Probably, he reckoned, the Tuareg wouldn't be watching us, and anyway we couldn't stop in camp with but half a skin of water. We were forced to abandon many loads, for which the Tuareg bandits must have mightily praised Allah, in order to make place for the wounded on the animals. Peters and Poiteau were bad cases—delirious; and several of the Hausa as well; but there was no help for it. We started at about eleven, immediately after the moon sank, as quietly as possible, purposely leaving the camp-fires smoldering, with all smoking prohibited.

Fieldmorre, as navigating officer, led the way—although the lance-thrust through the thigh was obviously painful, he wouldn't ride—steering by the stars and checking the course by his phosphorescent compass. The only good point was that night traveling was cooler, which didn't make a fellow's thirst so bad; yet the cries and screams of the wounded, boxed in their wicker panniers on the swaying dromedaries, was mighty painful, for nothing could be done for them except dope, of which Seeger made a merciful use.

We kept on steadily and silently, halting for a quarter of an hour every two hours. Reckoning at three miles an hour, we ought to be about fifteen miles away from the site of the fight by dawn, and hence pretty well out of sight. Naturally they could easily have caught us up on our trail, but during the rests I could not distinguish with my ear to the ground any sign or sound of animals moving.

At long length the east flushed as suddenly as a girl blushes. Fieldmorre called a halt. As the sun leaped, in that greedy sort of way it does down there, I joined Fieldmorre, Vèron and Billy, searching the horizon ahead with binoculars. Nothing but a circle of shale and sand.

As we talked in low tones and had just decided to serve out a small ration of water, which we reckoned would leave half a cupful per man and a whole one each for the wounded, Doc Seeger came up and reported that Poiteau and five Hausa were dead.

"Perhaps better so for them by the look of that!" I commented, gesturing ahead.

We buried them there, deep, so that at any rate they should sleep soundly. We went on again till midday, then halted for the camp to rest during the worst of the terrific heat.

One mouthful of water was served out to each fit man and half a cup to the wounded. In the blistering silence of Thorpe's desert, the raving of the wounded crying for water sounded dreadful.

"I'm pretty darned certain there were wells around that last camp," said Fieldmorre once, "otherwise those blasted Tuareg wouldn't have camped there—that is, not such a crowd of them."

However, there was no sense in "ifs" and "whys" just then. The only thing that had got me was the knowledge that if that marabout had told the truth an ugly end was sure. Of course, we all knew that, and had known it when we voted to go on; but naturally we didn't use it as a topic of conversation. I did ask the melancholy Sabah, aside, what he thought. He kind of half-closed his eyes as if about to pray and replied in Arabic: "Allah is All Merciful! All Knowing! Compassionate!"

"He sure is!" I snapped peevishly.

The old Syrian looked at me—in a pitying kind of way, I thought, and I resented it.

"The infidel," he continued in Arabic, "knoweth not what he doeth; for hath not the Prophet said, 'There is no good in him?' "

"Lordy!" I exclaimed. "I thought you'd quit that stuff years ago."

"Who knows the heart of a man, Mr. Tromp?" he retorted in English.

I went off thinking, "There's something wrong with that guy; touch of the sun, or maybe bad case of cold feet;" but somehow he had made me feel uncomfortable and depressed. As a kind of restorative I went to talk to Billy, trudging along with his left arm in a sling.

Sundown came, but brought no signs of our Tuareg friends. We got under way about eight o'clock, wondering what the morrow would bring, a candid answer to the question running in each man's mind. That night was like the previous one, except that Peter's screams made a fellow bite his lips and almost cuss the poor devil for doing it. Some time in the early morning the cries stopped, and I thought that Seeger must have given him an extra shot of morphin to ease him; but it was another kind of dope that had got him.

The dawn brought an answer written in brass and steel. Not one of us had a word to say. We buried the dead. We served out the last water to the fit. We marched till midday. Fieldmorre and Billy were going through it, the former limping with screwed-up lips. I wanted to urge him to abandon a load or at least to let me help him, but I knew that the reason he and Billy were suffering—and every one of the wounded were sticking it out in the same fashion—was to hearten the blacks; with the result that the Hausa, ever with an eye on the white, stuck it out splendidly, each helping his own wounded shoulder to shoulder.

No one talked, for there was nothing to say. Except for the slither of feet on shale and the occasional grumble of a dromedary, who—lucky beast—didn't need a drink, the whole march was in frizzling silence, each and every eye fixed on the dancing horizon, slow and silent as a funeral.

When we halted, the brass and steel of sun and shale was unbroken, and there was not a five-finger width of shade. The few orders given were in low tones. Not a man murmured, save for some of the delirious and dying in their baskets, for whom Seeger had kept a few mouthfuls of water.

I DIDN'T sleep, I don't think a soul in camp did. I pulled the hood of my *jelab* as far over my head as possible and sucked the stone of a ring I wore. I honestly think that every one of us would have blessed the Tuareg had they turned up, for the relief of making an end of it.

Maybe I've gone through worse —— than that; I know I've gone longer without water, thanks to the Mahdi; yet I don't know. At least I was alone, and although in one way a fellow feels better with some comrades, yet—when you can't do a darned thing for wounded pals I guess you feel worse.

I remember watching a shadow—got kind of fascinated by it—creeping around Billy's head. Sometimes I could swear that the darned thing wasn't moving at all; then I forced myself to shut my eyes and look again; after a small eternity to discover, by an effort, measuring the distance by a withered blade of yellow grass, that it had possibly moved a tenth of an inch.

As the sun set we rose and fastened our

binoculars on the east, hoping that the morning and noon glare had hidden hope from us. In the sunset the darned desert looked like a pewter plate set at the bottom of a toy balloon in scarlet and gold.

"Come, you fellows, rouse up the boys and let's get along!" bawled Fieldmorre, fingering a pipe which he dared not smoke. "Hey! O'Donnell! Pexton! Show a leg there!"

A stir ran through the camp at the command. Figures wrapped in their *jelabs*, looking like corpses laid out, shivered into life.

"Be gob, will ye git up, ye lazy hounds o' ——!" shouted O'Donnell in a husky roar.

The guttural "arrrghs" of the camel-drivers responded. Packs were lifted on to the animals, grumbling like gurgling water. ——! Like gurgling water!

The last of the moon was 'way down—dry as a piece of tin.

So began another night, knowing that destiny, as the Arabs say, was written in the dawn of the morrow.

That night most of us were hanging on to the ropes of a dromedary saddle when the dawn came. Fieldmorre had been forcibly put in a basket. Answer: Scarlet like blood and steel and brass. The silence of the last half of the night had been broken by the screaming laughs and howls of those who had been broken.

There were the dead to bury. We halted long enough for that. I took the compass from Fieldmorre, looking at the forms lying about on the shale; and, drawing my revolver, I said to Billy—

"Come on, old son, we've got to get along."

Billy's haggard eyes, in a face like a dirty piece of paper, brightened, and his mouth twisted into a grimace as he lugged out with his gun in his right hand.

" 'When you come to the end of a perfect day'," he croaked.

I tried to laugh. Hardwicke rose up near me. His lips were swollen, but he gestured. I felt kind of sick, but I bawled angrily, I didn't know why—

"All hands on deck!"

Pexton, Seeger and O'Donnell came up from somewhere. Most of the Hausa were lying down, but at our shouts and croaks most of 'em got to their legs.

"Water close to," suddenly asserted Pexton in very broken Arabic.

But they understood, and, never doubting the magic of the white, bucked up instantly. The only troublesome people were the drivers. One fool ran out into the desert yelling for Allah. Billy shot another, who apparently went mad and tried to gut a dromedary. They couldn't curse much; and with a good bunch of the Hausas' bayonets close to their hindquarters we persuaded 'em to get the beasts on the march.

When we had got going I said to Pexton—

"Why did you say there was water ahead?"

"I don't know," he replied vaguely, and pawed at his throat. "Keep 'em going, I suppose."

Somehow or other I had hoped that he knew that there was water ahead. A fellow gets such fancies when he wants to badly. Trudging along between heaven and earth, or so it seemed to me, I vaguely realized that we'd never get the outfit on the move again when once they stopped.

I admit right here that I felt it was all up; just the idea—kind of made like that—that kept us moving on. Anyway a fellow can't sit down and die while he has the strength left to crawl. Blind instinct of self-preservation, I reckon.

Ever see a hen fall overboard in mid-ocean? She'll go paddling on, you bet, just as if she hoped to swim to Sandy Hook. Depends whether you've got it strong—that's it. Good that some of us have. Anyway we usually do, don't we?

We knew, Billy and I, and those that were more or less fit. So I made O'Donnell lead with the compass, and we loafed in the rear, with our guns handy. Those dromedaries saved us; but I hated 'em, for they were the only living things that didn't sway like a drunk on Broadway. I thought I didn't, but——

How many hours it was I don't know, nor even where that source of heat, as some boob called it, was. Funny the way you see all kinds of lights, rainbow sort of stunts.

I had worked out a wonderful theory that I was as strong as Dowie is on the preacher stuff, but that the marabout's poison had come back to stay. I began to laugh.

I heard Billy or some one—wasn't sure who it was—laughing too, like a jackass. I asked what was the joke, and some one said that there was a lake with a kind of flat-iron beside it just ahead.

I said: "Oh, my God! He's gone!"

I recognized Seeger's voice saying, "Chew this!" and I felt him thrusting something into my mouth. Whatever it was it tasted wet. I chewed good and hard. Then—— But, oh, ——! What's the good? Maybe some of you know what it is? Anyway I wasn't the only one. Some time or other I heard Billy say, "Wake up," and felt kind of ashamed that I was leaning on two arms.

Then I became conscious that the bunch was spread out all over the place and that Billy was seated on the ground making noises like a crow with a cold. I couldn't grasp what it was all about for some time. I got it from O'Donnell, who was shaking me violently by the arm and croaking—

"For th' love o' ——, can't ye see?"

I followed the direction of his finger and made out slowly—wondering whether I was seeing things again—the cool blue of forest.

During those hours I had forgotten the details of Thorpe's diary, forgotten how he came upon an escarpment which had led to the forest. I'm mighty sure no one knows how far the forest was when we saw it, nor how long we took to get there. But we did.

Seemingly we fell down that incline to a stream running down from the snows of the distant Atlas. The sight and smell brought me to my senses, more or less at any rate.

I had sufficient savvy to run around keeping our fellows from killing themselves by getting bellyfuls of water. It is true some did go out that way. And I remember helping Seeger, Billy Pexton and O'Donnell to fill waterskins and give small *cometjes* to the other fellows who couldn't kill 'emselves in that stream of life and death. It was a nightmare; sort of thing you've got to do when you're blind drunk, and somehow you do it.

We posted some pickets, who promptly went to sleep—but we all slept. ——, how we slept! If all the Tuareg in the Sahara had come down on us, I'll bet we wouldn't have waked up!

## X

GLORY! But I'd never been so crazy about a tree in my life—shade, man, from that blistering sun. When I awoke I thought I had died and was in heaven confronting an angel. True, he seemed rather dirty and unshaven and was apparently a Mohammedan angel, which seeemd to mix things; but in his hand was—tea! I had always thought Pexton was white all through, but now——

Roused up, we kicked the sentries awake under their respective trees—every soul in camp, including the beasts, had a private tree—and began to get the camp shipshape. Then we had more tea and a wash. There are beautiful things in this world!

We decided to stay over several days to give the wounded a chance and everybody else to get fit. So accordingly we set the men busy building a *zareba*.

Fieldmorre was bad; not seriously, but the jagged wound of the barbed lance began to suppurate, and he had a high temperature, probably caused by lack of attention and his exertions. Billy's arm wasn't a pretty sight. After my hog sleep I was fairly normal again.

We—those who were fit—rigged up a shelter and made the wounded as comfortable as might be.

There were plenty of chores to be done anyway—waterskins to be sewn up, packs reset and renewed, Maxims overhauled and rifles cleaned, beasts grazed and stores checked. We stopped five days at Haven Camp, as we called it, unmolested; might not have been a savage man or beast in all Africa so far as we were concerned. The rest pulled us all together. Fieldmorre could walk around again, and Billy got fresh if you tenderly inquired after his wound.

During those days Vèron and I tried to get to the bottom of the mutiny business; but although there were a few Mohammedans left among us they swore that they had remained faithful, and that they knew nothing whatever about the affair. The pagans gave another account; but it was biased, and moreover the Mohammedans had been evidently as much taken by surprize as we had been.

One afternoon I was dozing beneath a tree when I heard a —— of a hullaballoo and ran over to see what the row was about. I found Famitty cussing out a group of the Hausa. He said that he had been prowling round and had struck a big python; but when he went back for his gun the Hausa had started a fuss, saying that it was sacred and must not be killed or else the "whole boilin'," as Famitty put it, would be put out.

I quieted 'em and told Famitty they were

yelling their heads off because they, like nearly all these tribes, have some animal, beast, reptile or bird, as a totem, just the same as our Indians have. In return for acting as savior to their ancestor, my sergeant, after beating dead cats for some time, gravely informed me that the catastrophe was due to the first marabout, who by swallowing snakes had insulted and destroyed their own brethren—the sergeant's—and their ancestors had sent the Tuareg after us to avenge them. Very interesting!

Naturally as we got our wind back we began to discuss the immediate prospects before us, inclined, being just human, to forget much of the past. But one thing we did realize, and that pretty keenly, was that the expedition had been badly hammered before even reaching the war-like, powerful tribe, according to accounts, which Thorpe had described.

We four—Fieldmorre, who had recovered his strength marvelously (guess he had a constitution like a bull as most of us who buck fate in the four corners of the earth must have anyway), Billy, Vèron and myself—held council. We were still, after the thorough overhauling—save a few of the wounded—a pretty husky bunch to tackle; ten whites, Sabah, and some scores of Hausa, from none of whom we reckoned there was danger of treachery again. Reviewing things, we felt rather bucked, and wondered—or I did—why lately we had been so depressed.

We had already sent out scouts, but they had reported that within three hours of the camp there was nothing but uninhabited, dense forest. We decided to trek on the morrow, and issued general orders to prepare.

Next morning, while the bustle of striking camp was going on and we four were drinking our coffee, O'Donnell came up looking worried.

"Be gob, cap," said he to Fieldmorre, "there's some devil-devil business going on. For what would I be finding but my picket turned into iligent corrpses!"

"What's that? Shot? When?" demanded Fieldmorre.

"Your picket speared?" suggested Billy.

"—— a shot nor a wound for all that I can see," replied O'Donnell. "Will ye come and have a look for yourselves? Maybe the doc had better come along. One's lying as if he was just taking a snooze," he continued, as we followed him, "and the other guy's away in the grass as if he'd tried to crawl to camp."

They were lying as he had described 'em, the fellow in the grass all doubled up as if in pain. Doc Seeger began to overhaul one and Fieldmorre the other.

"Can't see a sign of a wound," Seeger was saying, when Fieldmorre ejaculated—

"Pigmies, by ——! Look at this!"

He held up between forefinger and thumb a tiny dart of wood.

"*Ce n'est pas le nain du Congo!*" (It is not the Congo dwarf!) muttered Vèron.

"Good Heavens, I've never heard of pigmies as far north as this. Evidently——"

"That's a *pucuna* dart, by ——!" exclaimed Hardwicke. "I know 'em in Guiana."

"No, it isn't," contradicted Billy. "That's no Indian dart, nor pigmy either. It's too short. That's a dart from a *sumpitan*—a Borneo blow-pipe, you fellows. But for the love of Henry how did that get here?"

"Borneo!" I echoed. "But how——"

"It is," insisted Billy. "Lord, I know 'em well enough. Besides, a pigmy arrow is far longer, and so is a *pucuna;* and pigmy ones are feathered with leaves—ain't that so, Fieldy? Look, this is wild cotton."

"Perfectly correct," agreed Fieldmorre. "I should have noticed that at once. That's evidently how these fellows were bagged; silent and deadly enough, by gad!"

"Say," said I, "I'm going to scout around a bit." I hailed my Hausa sergeant and called up a section.

"How far can they shoot, Billy?"

"About sixty feet."

Putting the section in skirmishing order, with instructions to keep behind my line so as not to muss up the trail, I made for the nearest clump of trees which might afford likely cover. Very soon I found the spoor of a native. But that might have been made by any of our men wandering about during the day.

I followed one which led me to a biggish tree with large spreading branches. There I found what I had suspected I should—the damaged fungus and bruised bark and broken twigs, sign which I made sure was not caused by a snake by the fact that it was irregular, whereas a sinuous body would make a continuous impression.

"Some native was up that tree," I reported, "but who he was, Lord knows!"

But my trailing didn't help any, for it naturally didn't lead to any explanation of how Borneo darts came to be used in the middle of Africa. We went back to camp, discussing futilely, and got under way.

The first trouble was the forest, in which we had to have an advance guard ahead hacking a way through the parasitic creepers trailing from nearly every tree, a job entailing mighty slow progress, for a camel is a high and haughty beast. The second trouble was that noble animal himself, whose splayed feet aren't made for spongy services and with mud and water soon tend to get sore and rot.

AT SUNDOWN we were still in the dense forest. We made a rough *zareba*, and, knowing that there were blow-pipe folk about, placed triple sentries inside the barricade with a kind of shield of interlaced branches between them and the overhead trees. The moon was due to rise at about eight o'clock that night, and we planned to keep a special watch on the tree-branches and try to bag some of the *pucuna* sports.

But as we were finishing supper, at about seven, there came a cry and a shot, followed by several others. We rushed out, rifles in hand, in the direction of the corner of the *zareba* from which the alarm had come. One of the pickets had received a dart in the neck just under the jaw and was already almost dead. His comrades had fired blindly in the direction from which they reckoned the attack had come.

"There's two down over here," came Famitty's voice, followed by an oath and:

"My ——! they've got me!"

At that moment I felt the slightest breath against my cheek and saw a dart quivering in the loose sleeve of Billy's *jelab*. I, too, as the sentry had done, fired blindly and angrily into the trees, and was followed by a volley from the others.

"Get in the middle of the camp," ordered Fieldmorre, "and rake the trees with the Maxims. We ought to have thought of that before."

That was done. But beyond stirring up the squeaks of scared parrots, and killing a few of the birds probably, we heard no sign. However, men were placed with the machine guns trained on the trees. The moon rose, but we could distinguish no sign; nor were we attacked during the rest of the night. Famitty, poor ——, was gone almost as quickly as the Hausa had succumbed to the poison—probably snake stuff, only more rapid, Fieldmorre said, than the mixture the pigmies employ.

WE HELD a council of war again before starting; for, as Billy pointed out, if these unknown —— really meant business, they could, as they did in Borneo, play the —— with a caravan in the forest; particularly with animals which were compelled to follow slowly in single file. Accordingly we arranged to have men in sections marching between each dromedary, and to carry the Maxims unslung and as ready as may be to set up.

The order to march was given. Then some one discovered that the men who formed advance guard and had with them a bunch of camp-followers, whose duty it was to cut a path, had ceased work, and that there was considerable hubbub among them. I went forward to investigate, calling for Hardwicke, who was in charge of them. The Hausa sergeant of his section came to me and said that the master was lost.

"What d'you mean?" I asked him angrily, and he replied that Hardwicke had heard something moving in the bush and had gone out to see what it was. As he didn't return, the sergeant sent four men to look for him. They didn't return. Then, alarmed, he had taken the whole section, but had discovered neither Hardwicke nor the men.

I cursed him for not reporting the matter immediately, and, thinking that surely they had been shot with blow-pipe darts and were dying in the jungle, went back to the others. We took out twenty-five men with us and beat all around; but never a trace of the five could we find, which seemed to dismiss my theory that they had been bagged by the *sumpitan*.

However, we held up the caravan; and every white in camp, angry and anxious, together with all but forty Hausa whom we left with the machine guns to guard the camp, began a thorough hunt. Not a sign or spoor of any kind did we find. We got back to find that thirty-two of the Hausa with two machine guns—which they had humped themselves—had deserted.

"Good ——!" I cried. "Then those four

swine must have turned on Hardwicke and captured him!"

But worse problems now faced us; for we realized that we couldn't trust those Hausa who were left with us, pagans or no; as a matter of fact we were prepared for them to turn on us and attempt a general massacre at any moment, and wondered why they hadn't done so already.

We clustered together, we whites, nine of us, and the melancholy Sabah, and held a *shauri*. There was no talk of going back, that was out of the question anyway, for we'd thoroughly burned our boats. How to see it through was the only problem now.

In the middle of the discussion came one of the Hausa bearing an arrow—not a blow-pipe dart—around which was wrapped some paper and on the outside was some Arabic writing.

Both Sabah and Vèron read and wrote Arabic fluently. The former opened the document, which bore at the top an enormous seal bearing apparently a signature in Arabic and a symbol which looked like a kind of staff with entwined snakes, recalling the *caduceus*. It was addressed, said Sabah, to the sheik of the white infidels, and began in the Mohammedan style with profuse greetings and tiresome blessings from Allah and Mohammed.

It went on to say in most polite terms that it was the supreme will of the Master of the Faithful that the noble white infidels would refrain from entering the sacred country of the snake—whatever that meant—otherwise the said Master would be compelled to invoke the full vigor of the law—or words to that effect—and was signed "Baranindanan, Sultan of Melle."

"Lordy!" Billy exclaimed. "That must be the guy Thorpe wrote about in the ivory palace!"

"Sure it is!" I assented. "But he badly wants teaching how to behave."

"Certainly is —— cheek," commented Fieldmorre; "but——"

"I dunno," replied Billy. "In the custom of the country we ought to have done the usual thing by sending presents and asking permission to enter."

"That's right," I agreed; "but who in —— are we to give presents to? And the first thing he does—these Borneo thugs are his, I'll bet—is to try to wipe us out!"

"Well," commented Fieldmorre, "he certainly seems to have us in check, but—we haven't lost the game yet in my opinion."

"The —— we haven't!" said I.

Vèron butted in with a suggestion that we send a reply stating our objects and friendliness and demanding the formal permission. But by whom were we to send such, even if we did agree to compromise? Vèron again suggested that we shout a request in Arabic to the forest, swearing safe conduct to whomsoever should come forth to receive our reply to Baranindanan the Sultan of Melle. Billy and I grumbled. But Fieldmorre and Vèron and Sabah were for the attempt.

"Guess there's nothing doing," said I, when Vèron and Sabah had shouted their heads off in vain on every side of the camp.

By this time it was toward noon. The remainder of our Hausa seemed to be perfectly loyal. We brought up those who had remained in camp and questioned them. They swore that they didn't know anything about it. One added, under pressure, that most of those who had deserted were Mohammedans who had pretended to be pagans. Asked why, they said they didn't know.

"Guess they don't," opined Billy, "and if they do they'll never tell, for, you bet, they're under a tabu of some sort."

We seemed fairly balled up every way we turned. There seemed but one thing to do, and that was to go on with it. I took the advance cutting-guard myself, and the caravan piled along behind me in as close order as they could. Not a thing happened.

Toward four o'clock, I guess it must have been, I saw brilliant sunshine through the trees and went ahead to scout. Right outside, on the forest edge, was a walled village—a mighty solid structure too.

"That's where those sons of guns came from last night," I said to myself, "and probably where Hardwicke is."

I went back and reported. We halted the caravan, and went out to the edge to have another look at the village, when I noticed that there wasn't a sign of life; no movement nor smoke.

Anyway we brought out the caravan, formed up into open marching order, and advanced within shot of the walls. We hailed, but there was no reply.

We held a *shauri* again. Vèron volunteered to go and parley or investigate. I didn't like his going, but he went. We saw him shouting at the gate; then he disappeared within.

We waited and waited, but he didn't return. Night came.

"By the Lord!" said I to Billy. "I believe Hardwicke was right—that son of a gun's gone over to the enemy."

"But they aren't French, you boob," retorted Billy.

"Form square and camp," ordered Fieldmorre.

## XI

NOT a sound broke the night save the usual hum of the adjacent forest. The moon rose, making the small village—*ksur* as they call 'em—with its great walls and square flat roofs, with one single mosque minaret, look as if it were made of paper. But what was mighty strange was that there was not the slightest sign of any inhabitants.

When the sun was killing the moonlight we were holding another *shauri*, in the middle of which Sabah, nearly blubbering, begged us to quit right there and go back. That was out of the question, but it got me all balled up about the man.

One moment I almost suspected him of having something to do with the treachery in camp, and the next I was sure that it was a bad case of cold feet arising from utter loss of nerve—which might happen to the bravest man. Fieldmorre, who had known the man so long, was as puzzled as I was. True, we guessed he was fifty odd or maybe sixty, which wouldn't be such a lot for a man of a northern race. Of course we wouldn't listen to him.

We discussed the situation from every angle we could think of. Now we knew at any rate that the Sultan of Melle was at the back of this mystery stunt, but we could not figure out what the game was. We worked up all sorts of fantastic schemes to account for the *sumpitan*. The most feasible was suggested by Billy—that this sultan guy was either a Malay or an Arab who had been in Borneo and had imported the idea. However, that wasn't going to help us any to know the gentleman's pedigree and private vices.

The point was, what were we going to do about it? Fieldmorre suggested giving the village the go-by. But what about Hardwicke and Vèron? queried Billy. And anyway we didn't like the idea.

Billy wanted to follow Vèron. Fieldmorre volunteered to go—and I. We nearly fell to quarreling about it, finally compromising by forming up fifty of the remaining Hausa with Maxims—although we had doubts as to whether they might not turn on us or bolt—and marched the column up to the gates of the *ksur*, through which Vèron had entered. Billy hailed, but his voice hit the arch and came back mockingly.

"Plunk a couple of pom-poms to wake 'em up," urged Billy.

"No," I vetoed; "we don't want to start something unless we've got to. I'll try 'em out. You keep the gate covered."

I walked straight up and found the gate—a ponderous affair, covered with sheet iron and huge nails—ajar. I pushed with my shoulder, poking my gun in front of me. It swung creakily into the usual passage-room which, after the Roman fashion, is designed to stop a straight rush through the gates. On the stone divan were lying a few filthy tarboosh, a broken sword and water-skin. I peeked around the corner, looking through the other arch to the right into a square, the far walls of which were lighted by the rising sun.

Advancing to the inner entrance, I saw that the square was empty except for a mangy native dog which ran yelping at me, and a bundle of rags, which by the wooden bowl set in the ground in front I knew to be one of the usual beggars. There was no other sign of life.

"Mighty queer," I thought. "Probably Vèron went on exploring and got nabbed.

And after another cautious look around I went back and reported. We brought in the men; and, leaving Pexton with a section and the pom-pom at the gate—O'Donnell and Sabah were in charge of the camp—we others, Fieldmorre, Billy, Hibbert, the doc, and myself, with the forty Hausa, marched in to explore.

We made a systematic house-to-house search, but we could not discover a single man or woman or child. Signs were plenty that folk had lived there within a few hours or a day. Even ashes of a charcoal stove were still warm.

The mosque was very tiny, a little larger than the base of the minaret, pretty ancient and as usual in a bad state of repair. We looked inside and about, expecting that if any human Mohammedan was there the presence of our infidel feet would draw him.

We tried to get some sense out of the horribly diseased beggar, but he seemed

genuinely crazy, as many of 'em are, monotonously repeating his cry for alms as if the place were thronged with market folk.

From the flat roof of a house we could see our camp and the surrounding country. To the east the land seemed scrub and marsh, and the horizon was obscured by thick clumps of trees. A track but not a road, as Thorpe had described, ran out from the village toward the east. Even the binoculars failed to show up any cattle or animals.

"Darned queer!" said Billy. "They must have smuggled Vèron out into the forest last night before the moon rose—if they haven't killed him."

"I say, I don't like the look of that forest," remarked Fieldmorre, examining it through his glasses. "The sultan evidently isn't going to wait to get nasty, and he may have some card up his sleeve. They may try to rush the camp from the forest and box us up here. We'd better skedaddle, I think."

We did. And back in camp we tried anew to work out a plan and solve the mystery. Nothing doing. The more we argued the more balled up we got. Sabah professed entire ignorance and began to plead that we return until Fieldmorre told him to shut up.

What the next move on the part of the Sultan of Melle would be we couldn't guess; nor what the idea was in the cessation of attack from his blow-pipe fiends and the deserted village. Doc Seeger suggested that perhaps he was going to hold Vèron and Hardwicke as hostages to force us to give up the trip. But if so he didn't seem anxious to start negotiations. We decided to go on.

As the Hausa seemed to be trustworthy again, those that were left, we abandoned the dangerous column formation and put out flankers and an advance guard. We hadn't a sufficient number of whites left now to ride with them. I took the advance guard.

The clumps of trees turned out to be the forerunners of what looked like a belt of forest in a slight depression. I entered with my eyes skinned, expecting either an ambush or some of the *sumpitan* folk. But all was as quiet as an African forest ever is. I went to the edge and signaled to the boys to come on.

An hour before sundown we were still in the forest and forced to camp. As there were now only seven whites left, and Sabah, we divided the night into two watches of four hours each, sailor fashion. Pexton and Hibbert were in mine, and Doc Seeger and O'Donnell in Billy's; and Fieldmorre was on deck all night, as he put it. We built the usual *zareba*, the Hausa working willingly to assist the camp-followers against time; also we had the shields against possible darts and had the Maxim trained high for action.

The evening passed quietly, without any sign except from the dismal Sabah, who became well-nigh hysterical. The doc tried to make him take a dose of *brometum natricum* to steady his nerves, but he wouldn't. Fieldmorre remarked aside that he was beginning to regret that we'd brought him, as he was becoming a nuisance. We decided generally that the trip had been too much for the old man and that he was going to pieces.

I came on from two to six. At a quarter to two I relieved Billy and went the rounds; everybody was at his post. I duly reported to Fieldmorre "all correct," and he lay down again, as he hadn't yet got over his wound.

THE moon was away up looking like a silver ceiling with the forest branches making fancy patterns. The fires were smoldering red; and about them, with their rifles stacked, were the Hausa rolled up in their blankets. From our quarters beneath a light shelter—for we seldom troubled to pitch the tents—soon came the fierce snore of O'Donnell.

"Lordy, I've never heard a man snore like that guy," I remarked to Pexton and Hibbert as we squatted by the central fire. "He's sure enough to wake the Sultan Barinandan, or whatever he calls himself."

"Probably adenoids," commented Pexton prosaically. "Indeed he should have them cut."

"Who d'yer think this 'ere feller is?" inquired Hibbert, referring to the sultan, and that started a general camp-fire conversation.

Every ten minutes or a quarter of an hour I'd send the two around the camp in opposite directions, but each time the sentries were wide awake. Camels grumbled or grunted; a man coughed in his sleep; some drama of forest life would set a parrot squawking now and again or another bird to harsh squalling.

A little after five, when the time came for another round, I told off Hibbert to go and wake up the cook to get our coffee and the head man of the drivers. Pexton took the left side and I the right.

About half-way around my beat I came to a sentry standing close against the *zareba* in shadow, and, contrary to orders, away from his dart shield. I spoke, and he beckoned me.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

"Look," said he.

In a patch of moonlight filtering through the trees I saw a giant monitor lizard fully six feet long. I drew my revolver.

"No, master, no," he whispered; "that is sacred."

Knowing their superstitions, I refrained. I shoved the gun into the holster and took a step forward to have another look, for in the weird light the thing looked kind of illuminated.

At that moment I heard a piercingly shrill call. I was conscious as I turned in surprize, of a swift shuffle of feet and a glimpse of the forms of the Hausa around the fire rising in the air. Then——

## XII

"GLORY! What the——"

Through a slit, a streak of brazen blue nearly blinded me. I seemed to be swaying about like a gig in a sea. I could scarcely move my arms or legs. The effort made me conscious of a head which seemed as big as a gas-house.

Gradually I realized where I was—sewn up, nigh, in a basket on the side of a dromedary, and a fast one at that. Clawing at my plaited cage, I could see a plain of grass and scrub and a bunch of men who looked like our old friends the Tuareg, except that they had no masks.

Then I began painfully to figure out things. I recalled the camp and the giant monitor and the swift vision of the sleeping Hausa rising up just before I was put out—evidently by a mighty smart blow on my occiput, I reflected dismally, cussing myself for being such a mutt as to give the fellow the chance.

What had happened after that I could only conjecture. Judging by these memories, I guessed that the shrill cry had been a signal for the men to turn on us. If that were so, what had happened to my comrades?

As the man evidently could just as easily have killed me, they did not intend a massacre. Which meant—what?

Where were Billy, Fieldmorre and the rest? Why had the Hausa revolted at that particular moment at a given signal? Collusion evidently. With whom? Whom else but the Sultan of Melle, who had requested us to get out of the country?

But if, by some power unknown, he had seduced the non-Mohammedans from allegiance and had us in his power, why had he not just saved trouble by wiping us out? African potentates weren't usually given to humane considerations.

A dozen whys and hows tangoed about in my mind, to the accompaniment of the throbs in my head and the swaying of the beast. And to every one I couldn't find a safe answer.

By straining my back and nearly bursting my head I managed to catch a glimpse of the shadow of a dromedary behind me, which showed that the time—taking for granted that we were going east, more or less—must be fairly late in the afternoon, and that probably some one or more of my pals were confined in a similar state to myself on that aforesaid beast. Whether the latter part of the guess was right I never knew; for when at length we passed beneath the dark of a town gate and came to earth—or the dromedary did—in a courtyard, I saw that there were no others with us.

A big negro, evidently a slave, released me from my grass Pullman and helped me to my feet; for after that ride, trussed like a chicken for market, I could scarcely stand upright. Advancing toward me in the chromatic glow of sunset was an individual who gave me some shock, for I sure took him for Casey come to life. There was the stubby, pugnacious nose, the carroty beard and mustache and blue eyes——

"For the love of—" I began, and stopped as guttural notes fell from the familiar mouth and I saw that the fellow was a native, evidently a Berber from his complexion and a man of high rank from his bearing and clothes.

He greeted me courteously, although naturally not giving me the *salaam alik'* (peace be with thee) as no true Mohammedan will ever give it to an infidel. He informed me that his house and all therein was at my disposal, and invited me forthwith to enter. Knowing the Arab more or

less, I accepted this bluff politely and followed the slaves who were attending him.

Beautifully worked brass bowls with water and soap were brought, and even native unguents for my cracked head. Later I was conducted into a large and finely decorated room where I found him seated—or squatted—upon a divan awaiting me with Moorish tea.

He made no reference at all to the manner of my coming nor to the method of my going. We talked oriental commonplaces; and after the ceremonial, three-thimble glasses of tea and food appeared. I did fairly well, and remarked that he noted my agility with my fingers in eating in the oriental manner; but no sign was expressed upon his Casey face. He seemed to be a ghastly joke; for several times I found myself biting my lips to stop from laughing and saying—

"Aw, come now, Casey; cut it out, boy!"

In due course—that is, after we had jabbered away for an hour or more—I tried him with a feeler regarding my comrades.

The answer was a solemn inquiry as to whether I had ever been in El Misr (Cairo). Then I got it that whatever questions I might put would not be answered, just in the same style that old man Ma-el-Einen had treated us.

That's always the way with an oriental: You might as well ask questions of a wall except that the wall won't trouble to reply, and the oriental will most politely—about something else. I just had to accept the fact. And I knew my lesson, learned in those years among my Mahdi friends.

However, the fact that I was safe and courteously treated implied—if not conclusively, then probably—that my companions were also all right, and for that reason I did not feel terribly worried. I tried, if you get what I mean, to pump up all I knew about this kind of guys and hold my naturally impulsive temperament in check to play their game.

One hint only my host condescended to give me before I was dismissed; and that was that I was to be taken to see the Commander of the Faithful—as the Sultan of Melle had the nerve to call himself—immediately.

IN MY room that night—not uncomfortable in the Moorish way—I'll own up I got a bit down in the mouth the more I pondered. For one thing, the lid seemed to have been pretty thoroughly put on our little filibustering expedition. As I thought back, bitterly blaming myself for this and that, I realized, more or less, that we had been doomed from the start.

We couldn't possibly have reckoned on the treachery of not only the Mohammedan Hausa but the pagans as well, and all men who had come from a thousand miles away, noted for their military prowess and for their fidelity to whites. There must have been treachery from the very beginning.

Who was the traitor? Sabah? Vèron? Naturally these two names jumped into my mind. But how? And why? All Sabah's interests lay with us; supposing Vèron was a French agent, what would it profit him to have the expedition wiped out or made prisoners by an unconquered tribe?

Tired with worrying and with my sore head, I went to sleep. The next morning at sunrise I was politely sewn up in my chicken-coop, and the journey proceeded. Four days there were of it, during which I saw only glimpses; was able to note nothing save that I was one of a convoy, and that the cattle were numerous and the cultivation was thick as we went deeper into the country. Each night I was let loose, fed and watered politely—by some kind of an official, I reckoned—and put in my basket again on the following morning. Traveling fast all the time tortured my limbs and back.

After sunset on the fifth day a halt and the hullabaloo of opening gates made me aware that we had arrived somewhere, I guessed at the city of Melle. I couldn't see anything of it, but judged that it must be a fairly large town by the time we took to get to my quarters.

By the light of lanterns, and the jabbering I got a hint as we were passing under a gate that we were entering the gardens of the sultan and recollected Thorpe's description of the place where he had been lodged.

In the morning I was sure that I had guessed right, for from the windows I could see part of a very beautiful garden. Nobody came near me except, of course, the guard outside and a Nubian who brought my food—and mighty good it was, I'll own. In the late afternoon a big Berber fellow, magnificently dressed, approached, and, addressing me very courteously, invited me to follow him.

I hadn't much option, and as I made a guess that the superior fellow himself was at the other end I didn't try to kick.

"Now," thought I, as I walked beside my guide across the gardens, catching a glimpse of what Thorpe had meant by terrace gardens, "now I'm going to find out something!"

And I surely did. A heap more than I had ever reckoned, before I was through.

I noted that the palace seemed mighty big for one so far south as they—oh, sure, the escort wasn't far behind—took me into a large hall and then politely—they were great on that right through—into a room which I instantly recognized as the ivory room of Thorpe's diary. They didn't keep me long. Suddenly the big doors swung partially open, and two giant Nubians dolled up like the Arabian Nights beckoned me to enter.

Seated on a throne of marvelously carved ivory, inlaid with gold and stones—although I was too busy to notice that then—was a smallish, swarthy man robed in the Arabian manner from head to foot in white, and on the turban was an enormous emerald.

I walked straight toward this fellow who had about him a group of what Thorpe had described as nobles gorgeously dressed, and was about to salute him in the Arabic manner when something about the eyes gave me a shock. He, too, was gazing hard at me. Just as the idea dawned on me that here was another extraordinary resemblance to somebody whom I had known, such as had happened with the Casey sheik, a swift, lizard-like movement of the eye recalled his identity—the little woman-flogger, Gandy!

## XIII

IN THAT same moment he had recognized me and said quietly in English: "Ah! The big man who interfered with my woman! And made my slaves to run away!" and added in guttural Arabic, "Allah is All Merciful!"

Then without a movement of the head, shutting his eyes in that lizard fashion upon the men about him, he said softly—

"If it is pleasing in the sight of Allah and our lords, let it be that we speak alone, the big stranger and me."

Like a chorus came the reply—

"As our lord—whom Allah bless—wills!"

And each of the courtiers, as they seemed to be, gracefully inclining his head, filed out. While they were shuffling on their slippers on the threshold, the Gandy man did not remove his eyes, regarding me with a slight twist of the top lip like a threatening cat.

I returned the stare, but I guess I was mighty uncomfortable at the unlucky freak that had landed me in the power of this creature, of all men; and the brands of the Mahdi rankled in my soul at the thought of the revenge he was likely to try. I wondered at his leaving himself alone with me; but probably he had a gun beneath his robes. An impulse rose to rush and get him then and there, for the others couldn't be as fiendish as he would be. But then I had Billy and the others to think of.

"Well?" I said sharply at length.

"Well what?" he inquired softly.

"What are you going to do about it?"

"I don't know. It is something to think much about. But come, we will talk a little."

He turned and I followed, losing the sense of his identity immediately he turned his back, swathed in robes, as he led the way to a small door within a Moorish arch.

"Continue, sir!"

He stood aside for me to pass and flashed a mocking smile. I found myself in a corridor, down which he herded me. While I was wondering how on earth he had ever got there and trying to puzzle out what he was going to do with me, and whether Billy, Fieldmorre and the others would be all right, we arrived at another small door, beyond which was a room, smallish but long and high, with a large window overlooking the gardens.

The ceiling was raftered and magnificently decorated after the old Moorish manner. In one corner was a huge divan, with many Turkish tables in mother of pearl and gold, covered with golden trinkets. Against the wall, near the window, was a large desk—Louis XVI I think—littered with papers. Of course I didn't notice all this at the moment—just got a confused idea as he motioned me to the divan.

"Sit down, sir! My working den, y'know." He subsided, Arab style, into a mass of cushions, and smiled.

"Where did you get that way of sitting, Mr. Tromp, please?"

"Oh!" said I mechanically, vaguely conscious that his actions were intended to get me off my guard somehow. "The Mahdi taught me that."

"Oh, the Mahdi?"

He looked at me sharply.

"What do you know about the Mahdi, as you call him?" he asked.

"Only that I was his prisoner for over two years in the Sudan," said I. "And he left me a few scores to pay off if ever I meet the gentleman. That was just after we met," I added.

"Ah, yes!"

For one moment his eyes narrowed.

"Ah, yes! That was a mistake. It is always bad to interfere in domestic affairs. Yes? You made me very, very angry."

"So it seemed," I said dryly.

"Ah! So you laugh at me—in my own country, where I am sultan. Is not that too bad to do, sir?"

"You don't expect me to whine, do you? Now see here, why not say right out what you intend to do with me and my pals? And also what have you done with Thorpe, another friend of mine who came into this country, as well as the others, German and French, who disappeared?

"You will become thirsty, sir, if you do talk so much," he retorted mockingly, and clapped his hands.

A big Nubian eunuch entered, to whom he spoke in the dialect. The slave went out and immediately returned with a golden tray, a Moorish teapot in gold and glasses, with the usual paraphernalia of mint and sugar.

"Now, sir, are there any more questions you will like to ask me, please?"

I looked at him. Those cold lizard eyes were as blank as a piece of quartz.

"Sure," said I. "How on earth did you ever work this sultan stunt?"

"That is very interesting. It is about myself. I will tell you about that."

"I'd rather hear about the other topic first," said I grimly.

"I will tell you first," he insisted with an expressionless face, "because I like to talk about myself, yes."

"Nutty," thought I. "But what game is he playing?"

"Well, go on then," I replied aloud, guessing that it is as well to humor him in the circumstances.

"But you speak of a friend, a man named Thorpe. You did know him?"

"Sure, I knew him. I was at school with him," I said as I took a glass of tea from the eunuch, noting that it came from the same source as the glass for his master.

"Ah! And how, please, did you know that he was here?"

"His diary. Vèron—a Frenchman—bought it from a native down-country. Why, he described that ivory room of yours. Where is he now?"

"He is a nice man, yes. But I will tell you about myself."

Again that darned slipping the question.

"We will, if you please, sir, begin when we met. You did not stop to ask me why I was so compelled to punish that black lady——"

"Wasn't necessary."

"You are very gallant, sir, but sometimes much mistaken. I will, however, continue. In consequence of your hasty action I lost goods very valuable. I was not, sir, as you imagined, a collector then, but one taking from him to the market.

"However, Allah recompensed me for the evil that you had done to me. I was so fortunate as to assist a native chief to gain many captives and guns, and for that he gave me some of those guns, very good ones, and I meet very nice man from Somali—Ahab Reclos. We then became collectors."

"Slave-trading, you mean?" I interrupted, thinking, "A bright pair, I'll bet."

"It is a matter of term, is it not, sir? For some time we have very good luck, for our soldiers were very good and strong. I was still angry with you, sir, and asked Allah that we might meet again; and you see that Allah is good, is it not?"

"That's a matter of term, too," I retorted grimly.

"Ah, you think it is a joke? I, too. Ah, yes!"

And a ghost of a satirical smile came on the full mouth.

"But you were gone; I did not know where."

"Care of the Mahdi was my address."

"Ah, yes; so you say just now. Thet was a peety that I did not know, for the people of the Mahdi are my co-brothers in Islam, and they would have been glad for me to help them."

"They didn't need any help, —— them!"

"It is useless to swear in affliction, and not pleasing in the sight of Allah."

"Go on!" said I impatiently.

"As ever, the white man is impatient. But, sir, my story will be too short for you, I do think."

A slight snarl smeared his lips, and the lizard eyes narrowed.

"There's something in that," I agreed. "Make it an Arabian Nights show then."

"Ah, you are good joker. I, too, love good jokes. You have your leetle joke with me, and now Allah give me leetle joke with you, only more better, yes.

"Come," he said suddenly, gliding off the divan like a cat. "I wish to show you something—one of my leetle jokes."

I FOLLOWED, wondering what he could mean. He led me through the window and down five terraces to the edge of the lake, which I saw was artificially made by means of a dam. Farther along to the right were the bare white walls of a large building detached from the palace, which, looking upward, seemed to be a long, low, white-and-blue mass hanging over the terraces and the lake, as if suspended in the clear air. Around the lake I didn't see a single moving thing except upon one of the islands a flutter of robes.

We came through a regulation Moorish arch under the house and upon an enormous stone tank cut in the rock, around which were built a series of stone seats, bull-ring fashion, mounting up to a kind of portico of Moorish arches of the buildings behind, each one heavily decorated with mosaic work in small tiles. At the upper end, facing the lake, was a huge dais capable of accommodating half a hundred men, and in the middle was a throne seat in ivory.

I rubbered around, wondering what the idea was, for the darned thing reminded me most of a swimming-bath. Without a word Gandy led me to the steps of the great dais and up.

"This is the sacred House of the Snake," he explained with that infernal, quiet smile. "If you don't mind sitting down here, I'll show you—er—some performing snakes."

Determined to keep my mouth shut and my ears and eyes open, I squatted down obediently. From his robes Gandy produced a queer-looking reed pipe, upon which he began to blow, making weird, plaintive sounds. For twenty minutes or more, during which I began to think that he was surely crazy, he continued the uncanny melody—if you can call it such.

The stone tank was partly in shadow from the sinking sun. Then suddenly on the sunlit water beyond in the lake I saw a ripple, followed by a few others. Then far out I caught the glint of other ripples. Switching my eyes back, I saw the heads and curves of the gliding bodies of some dozen pythons.

I glanced at Gandy, seated in the throne chair. His eyes were partially closed and he seemed almost oblivious of me. For a moment a desire arose in me. Then I shuddered, for coiling out of the hood of his *jelab* from his neck was a black cobra. As I stared, kind of fascinated with disgust, I saw the snake was swaying its filthy head.

I felt mighty uncomfortable, and devoutly prayed for a gun. Thought I, this crazy maniac may tell the thing something and make it strike me as I sit here. I was on the point of getting up; but I remembered that a moving object always attracts any wild beast; maybe I'd irritate the snake by interfering with the awful dance or whatever it was.

But I couldn't keep my eyes away from it. I felt my shoulders contract and my lips tighten as the horrible thing squirmed right around the pipe in Gandy's mouth, and, getting a purchase on his hands, coiled around his head until twenty inches of the head and neck were poised above Gandy's head, swaying as if dancing to the music.

How long I sat there staring like a hypnotized bird at the disgusting sight, I don't know. The sound of a splash made me look down mighty quick. The pool below was alive with pythons, a heaving, wriggling mass, of glistening color like a soggy rainbow.

Honestly I felt sick. Hundreds seemed squirming and wriggling and shoving their snouts a foot or two out of the water, swaying as if in an ecstasy of delight. More, too, were gliding in from the lake—enormous—they appeared some twenty feet long or more—a nightmare of sea serpents.

I admit I scarcely breathed; plumb scared was the truth of the matter. I don't mind any animal, human or otherwise, with hair on, but snakes—ugh!

The cessation of the weird wailing of the flute thing made me look up with a jerk, remembering the cobra. Gandy, with the thing coiled round his wrist, smiled down at me.

"That is a good joke, yes?" he said softly, and there was a stranger and queerer tone in his voice, and as I looked into his eyes they appeared dilated—kind of exalted.

"Plenty, thanks," said I curtly.

But I kept my eyes on that cobra. As soon as the music ceased the thing paused uncertainly, peeked about, and then slithered down the cloth of the hood and shrank

into Gandy's clothes. Then I looked down at the swimming-bath. There was not a flutter or a ripple on the water.

"You are ready, please?"

"Sure," said I. "Where now?"

"It is late for the gardens. They are very, very beautiful. I made them."

"Oh!" I said.

As I followed him I noticed that the shadows had nearly reached the opposite side of the great aquatic amphitheater, forcing me to realize that I'd been fooling around with this snake stunt for some hour and a half, and it had seemed like twenty minutes to me.

Climbing up the terrace in the sunset, I had to admit that the gardens, with the snow-clad Atlas in the far distance just keeping the fire of the dying sun, were mighty fine. Gandy caught me pausing to look. His smile of pleasure bucked me up; for surely, I thought, if he is really tickled because I admire his gardens he must have some kind of conscience to him.

"Well, sir," said he as we reached the top terrace—I remarked from the way he climbed that he must be in fine condition—"what did you think of my snakes?"

"I don't like snakes," I said abruptly.

"Ah, that is a great peety! Prejudice, that's all."

## XIV

HE CONDUCTED me back without a word, I wondering what game he was trying to play, the meaning of this extraordinary show. When we were seated again he began abruptly:

"I must tell you the story about myself as I promise you, yes. When I am with Ahab one day, we think that we go to a new place, where the people are very fat and strong for the market; but this time Allah turned his face away, for they were too strong and fat—you see I know how to laugh, sir—and our men all did run away. They run away for the same reason that some of your soldier run aways."

"Why was that?" I demanded, curious to know.

"Because, sir, they were of the snake tribe and so were the fat and strong people, so then they were their brothers, you see."

"And why did the others who took us prisoners?"

"Because they were of Islam, and I am their chief, yes. Everything you do I did know. That your friends go talk with Mael-Einen and one friend go to America to get money to come and take the land of Ophir. Yes, sir, this is the land of Ophir. There is more gold than Sheik Suliman ever did want. You see?"

He gestured slightly to the golden things all over the room.

"There is more gold here than in all the world. But never shall any one have it, for it is mine, all mine. Everybody want gold, go mad for gold, yes. That is why nobody who come to visit me can go back, because you see he would talk and——"

Three fingers were gestured laterally, significantly.

"You'll have to go some day," I said. "Every foot of Africa will be known and explored."

"La! La!" he retorted in Arabic, waving two fingers in the gesture of dissent. "Every expedition that you white send never goes back. I have guns, I have men. It requires a big army to fight me, and that is too expensive, because Germany wants it, and England, and France; and not one dares to try. Allah is good. 'He causeth the infidel to be confounded,'" he quoted.

"How did you know that Billy went to America?" I demanded, thinking, "He reckons he's mighty cunning, but I'd better leave that alone."

"Beelly? I know, too, how many men you have, how many guns. I know for what you come. A gentleman who works for money tells me how many men you have. He talked with your white men in Funchal when they got drunk. He told me."

"Funchal!" I exclaimed. "What, that darned little baron with the dog?"

"If you please. I have plenty like that. They do not know who I am. They work and I pay. For, you see, I must not have people come to see me all of a sudden, yes?"

"But about Billy? How? How?"

"Mohammed Sabah he is——"

"What! Sabah!"

"Yes, please. When your Beelly go to America he come to see me, because I call him. And then he do what I tell him."

"But Sabah's quit Mohammedanism ages ago. How——"

"Once a son of Islam always a son of Islam!" he retorted, making me think of

Fieldmorre's saying. "Also he, too, in Syria, was of the snake—totem, you call it? He did not want to because he loved very much your friend Fieldmorre, but I told him to do nothing but tell me all I want to know. That he did."

"That's why he was so mighty sulky and gloomy!" I reflected. "Wouldn't give this beast away, and yet wouldn't actively engage in slaughtering us."

"Did he slit the water-bags?" I asked aloud.

"No, not Sabah. Your camel-drivers. I sent you messengers twice. One man pretended to swallow snakes, and another man you found in the desert. Tuareg, my friends for pay, I told to wipe you out. Then I thought it would be funny to see you, so I sent to tell them to let you come; but I have another reason.

"When you came into the forest I sent my *sumpitan*—Ah, yes, sir, I have been in Borneo—to tease you and make you what you call 'ratty.' But come, if you please, I will tell you my story about myself. You will find out everything you want to know before—before you will see my little joke."

As a matter of fact, these revelations of treachery right through made me feel more helpless than before, although how such a state could be I couldn't imagine. For a few moments I was so absorbed in trying vainly to see any chance of a break-away that I didn't hear what the megalomaniac was saying.

"—Ahab was wounded but I was not—*Hamdullah!* In a hut they kept us all night, and I listened to what they were talking about, and when I listened I found out why our men ran away—because of the snake brotherhood as I told you. Then I laughed softly and waited. I found a small piece of bamboo, and with that I worked all night. The next night they began to have a big dance in the forest by a pool of water, and they took us there. It is no use to talk, but to do. They tied us upon two cross-poles; but one arm was free, only one arm. Then they began to dance and from the water came great snakes, to whom they gave milk in great calabashes, and they worshiped them. Then the snakes went back.

"THEY began to dance around us before making us ready for the pot, for they were cannibals; but I am a Gandhi, son of a princess of Naga, and what do these poor children know of snakes? I drew from my breast the piece of bamboo which I had made, and upon that I began to play. They did not hear, for they were drunk and danced about us waving their spears and howling, but the snakes heard and they came back from the water. They came on, and when they drew near the men fell down upon the ground to salute them, thinking that they came to eat us. But no, they came, more than six or seven, and surrounded me as I played. They stopped there, yes, and danced with their heads. All the time I played. . . .

"I keep on playing. The snakes keep on dancing, for they can not go as long as I play. Then the people get mad, and they dance and howl and they break the legs and the arms of Ahab. He makes loud screams and cries; but I play, I play. They cut Ahab to pieces, small pieces, and the witch-doctors drink the blood and put his pieces on the fire and eat him, and dance and eat him. But I play with my lips swollen and the blood running until they have eaten and danced so much that they roll over one by one. Then I stop for rest and the snakes go back to their water.

"The moon goes down and the sun comes, and I am still on the terrible cross. But I watch, and presently when they begin to wake up I play again. Oh, how I play! And slowly the snakes come back one by one, and when they see this, and the drunkenness is gone, they cry out in fear and call that I am a god and fall down and worship me.

"Then I call out and tell them to take me from the terrible cross, but that they can not do, for they fear to touch the snakes which are dancing with their heads around me; for it is forbidden for them to touch or to hurt them. Then I tell them that I will send the snakes away, and I stop playing and they all go back. Then I am so tired that—I am not big and strong like you, yes?—that I faint. . . .

"When I found myself I was lying in the fetish house, and they brought me some food. Perhaps it was a piece of Ahab. I did not know. I ate. But outside they made a lot of noise and I listened. One young man, who I saw was chief, said I was what you call reborn son of the Snake, meaning the son of a great dead chief—since they must not say the names of the dead. And he wanted me to be kept in the fetish house always, because I was so holy.

But another man, old, who I knew was the medicine-man because of his necklace of teeth of men about his neck, he said no; that I was the dead chief reborn and that consequently I must be chief of the tribe.

"I thought very hard and fast. I thought I would like to be chief of the tribe better than to stop in that dirty house. They made a very big *shauri* because the young man he did not want to lose his job as chief, yes? I know how these people think and what they believe, and so I looked hard for the right way. I knew that if I could find the name of the dead chief I could make proof that I was that chief reborn. The name of the young chief was Futatanga. To be polite you mustn't mention a gentleman's name. Now I knew that when a dead chief dies any name of a knife, pot, anything which has one sound of his name must never be pronounced again. Therefore I listened for some word that had been changed.

"Presently I found it. '*M'pangata*' they call the nose, but other peoples call it '*m'dolini.*' Perhaps, I said to myself, two sounds of that are the dead chief's name—perhaps 'lini.'

"Now when a man gives his son a name he likes very much to give his own name, as you do; but these people can not do it exactly, as I tell you. Consequently they sometimes try to find a name that sounds like that but is not quite, you see. The name of the young chief was Futatanga. Perhaps, I said, the father's name was like that Futatanga. Only perhaps. I had to guess. I took the first two sounds 'Futa' and joined them to the last two sounds of the changed word for nose, '*m'dolini*'—'lini'—and put them together—Futalini. Perhaps—only perhaps—that was like the name of the dead chief. But if I said it fast perhaps they would not notice. I tried. I called out loudly and quickly—

" 'Futalini, the son of the Snake, the father of Futatanga, speaks unto you!'

"They grunted and made a terrible fuss. The old medicine-man had won, and I too. I was free and chief of the tribe! The name was not exactly Futalini but Fupaluni, but they did not notice that, you see. Wasn't I very clever? You see I am a genius, yes?"

"Sure," said I, trying to fathom in those incrutable snake eyes what he was after.

"Yes, that is so, yes. Then I worked very hard. I played often to make the snakes dance and presently I got guns from the Sudan—yes, a Gatling too—and made my tribe very strong. I told them how to fight and made great magic for them, and they won in battle. After that, nothing could stop them, for they believed I was a god. You see I am."

I didn't reply, scarcely knowing what I was supposed to say. At first I had reckoned he had some ghastly kind of perverted humor; now I was becoming more uneasy. His crazy talkativeness had calmed my first horror of being in his power, but now I began to suspect—I didn't know what, but worse.

"I am a god," he repeated, as if he hadn't taken any offense at my neglect to agree. "My name went abroad, and they worshiped me. I united all the forms of the Snake worship. I took prisoners and fed them for the feasts and gave them to the snakes. I became mighty. There were many among my peoples who were of Islam, and with them we made the others become also of Islam, and I drew them together and made them one.

"Then one day came a wise marabout from the country of Melle, and he spoke of the gold and the ivory and the cattle and told me of their history. A thousand years ago fair people had come from the east and found the gold and called the land Ophir. But, according to the will of Allah, they became drunk with wealth and idleness, and the other peoples ate them up.

"Yet again were they brought together and were known to man as the Empire of Melle, vast and powerful, from the Nile to the sea. Yet again they had fallen and now remained as small tribes who fought with each other. But there were many people of the Snake there.

"Then I saw why Allah had brought me there. Yes, I was to make once again an empire, and the gold and the ivory and the men and the women should be mine and Snake's!"

I shifted uneasily, for the quartz-like eyes had begun to burn, although the face showed hardly any excitement.

"The worship of the Snake is more old than anything in the world, the first religion. You are clever; you have read, yes? The Snake was worshiped in Carthage, in Greece, in Egypt, in Babylonia, and I am the incarnation of the Snake. Do you know who I am?"

He paused for an answer, and the eyes seemed to drill into me. I didn't know what I was supposed to say.

"I guess I don't," I murmured.

"I am the direct son of Khammurabi, the first King of Babylon, who made the laws of Khammurabi. That empire was taken six hundred years after—two thousand years before your Christ—by the Gandhies. Gandhi, the conqueror, took the daughter of King Shalmaneser for his wife. Then, seven hundred years later, the Gandhies took India, yes! You who think I was just a little—what you call—*dago*, yes? You who interfere with my business! You who smack my face!"

The voice died so that I could scarcely hear what he said.

"You have struck Khammurabi-Gandhi, Emperor of Ophir, Reborn of the Snake!"

As I sat staring at that frozen figure in robes, who looked somehow so cold that he seemed carved in marble, I felt the awful thrill of horror of one in the presence of the utterly insane. He mistook my look.

"Do not be frightened—now," he said softly.

"I'm not," I retorted, but I sure did wish I'd been able to pack a gun beneath my robes.

"I have told you this so that you can know how great is your crime, yes. Before you die you shall be sorry that you struck me; very, very sorry."

"What d'you mean?" said I, coming to myself a bit. "Is that a threat? D'you think you're going to murder the lot of us?"

"I do, yes. But not yet. I will have my joke; I shall wish you to know how you shall die. First your friends shall experience the same my friend Ahab Resol did when his limbs were broken and he was cut into small pieces——"

"——, you swine!" I shouted, maddened beyond discretion. "I'll wring your filthy neck!"

As I leaped for him he did not move. But my hand stopped in mid air, for peeping through the aperture of his *silham* was the hideous head of the black cobra.

## XV

"I SHOULDN'T," he said gently, smiling with those basilisk eyes. "You don't like snakes, yes?"

I don't. As I've said, I'm not scared of any animal with hair on, but a snake!—And the cobra is one of the most deadly snakes in Africa. I should have had enough time to strangle him or break his neck, but that wouldn't help me any and my pals less. I sat down again, muttering—

"I'll fix you yet, my friend."

"You are so strong," he purred mockingly. "Perhaps you want to slap again, yes?"

The peering head of the cobra shrank within the robe again. He clapped his hands twice.

"You will please to go back to your friend Beelly, and tell him who I am. You understand, yes?"

One of the gorgeous-robed men had appeared in the doorway.

"Now go, beeg man, and think about, dream about how nice your friends will look on the terrible cross and how the snake who you do not like will—will embrace them so."

He made his small hand coil like a serpent. I rose, turned on my heel and walked to the door, too mad to speak. But as I followed the waiting official or whatever he was, I pulled myself together. He led me down the garden and around to another portion of the palace, which seemed mighty large for this part of the world. I tried to tap him a little. But nothing doing! He was as tight as a clam.

In a big room, lounging on divans, with Moorish tea and coffee things in gold newly set out, I found Billy and Fieldmorre.

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Billy, jumping to his feet impulsively. "We thought you'd gone under for sure. Thank God!"

"Jolly glad to see you," said the imperturbable Fieldmorre.

But I scarcely noticed them at the moment. Billy says he thought I was crazy as I entered the room, for my hood was on one side of my shoulder, and with clenched fists I was muttering:

"Crazy! Mad! Dippy! Bug-house! Nutty! My ——, he's off his head— He *is* insane!"

"Who is insane, Tromp?" inquired Fieldmorre, bringing me to my senses.

"Who? Who? Who?" I began, trembling with rage.

"Don't hoot!" admonished Billy.

"The swine threatens to crucify you fellows and——"

"Who! What swine? Here, Phil, pull yourself together, old man. Sit down. That's it."

I sat on the divan, and as well as I could, related the whole story of my meeting with this crazy Levantine or Indian, the ghastly snake business and the story of the maniac's rise to sultan. When I came to the Khammurabi and the king of the Gandhi stuff I began to blow up again.

"I tell you he's plumb crazy," I insisted. "He says he's the king of the Gandhies descended from some guy in Babylonia two thousand years before Christ."

"Well, what if he is?" inquired the practical Billy. "I've met guys who claimed they came direct from Adam, but they had to get out just the same."

"Sure," said I, glaring at him; "but what're we going to do about it? We haven't got a darned pea-shooter, and he's going to crucify you fellows alive or something."

"Oh, of course that's out of the question," said Fieldmorre.

"Out of the question!" I exploded. "But what are we going to do? I'd have strangled the little runt, but that wouldn't help you fellows any."

"Call him!" advised Billy. "He's probably bluffing."

"'Bluffing!' If you'd seen those darned snakes and the palace you'd guess he wasn't bluffing any."

"That's quite possible," assented Fieldmorre. "Probably he is mad, but from what you say there may be something in his boasts."

In such a crisis your nerves seem to get tautened. I could hear the faint murmur of tropical life without, the deep rumble of a man's voice a long way off, and the faint thrumming of some kind of stringed instrument, and over all:

"*Allah Akbah-h! La ilaha-illa—Allaha—wa Moham-med er-ras-u-u-l—A-la-hi-i-i!*"

The cry of the *muezzin* made me shiver; seemed like an invisible whip-lash. I shuddered, thinking of my Mahdi friends. My ——, I knew *them!*

"What I can't get," I broke out, "is why he wanted to put that story over and—and hang fire."

"Have you ever watched a cat playing with a mouse—let him go and catch him?" said Fieldmorre. "That's why. That's the Oriental. And that's why, too he hasn't set a guard over us, I guess. Wants us to try to beat it, knowing we haven't any place to beat it to. Lots of fun rounding us up again."

"He's mad!" said I futilely.

"What's that matter, mad or sane?" demanded Billy. "He *is*—that's the trouble. The point is too mighty simple; what are we going to do about it?"

"And the other fellows?" said I.

"I guess they'll go the same way as we do if we don't find a way out," opined Billy.

"Sure," said I vaguely. "As far as I can figure out," I continued after a moment, "blotting him out won't help much, for we'll go just the same. His followers will see to that."

"Dunno so much," said Billy. "Usually when the big noise goes there's nothing much more doing in a case like this. If Napoleon had died at thirty there wouldn't have been any all-European domination. When they got him on Saint Helena they'd got the whole works."

"That's no good," declared Fieldmorre. "Remember we're infidels. They consider him a kind of *shareef*."

"But can't we figure out a plan to stall somehow," suggested Billy, "to give us a chance to get away?"

"That's true; but how?" I asked.

"I'm for stalling," insisted Billy. "If it's got to be, it's got to be. We all know that. But there's no use in making darned martyrs of ourselves if we can turn a trick and remain ordinary mortals. I ain't just hankering after a golden harp and wings."

"I'm with you; but if you're so full of ideas, spit 'em out," I retorted.

"Well," said Billy slowly, "if I were in your shoes I'd stall, as I said. Find out how long before you're required to—to cash in. The longer you can play him the greater chance we have to make a break-away."

"And if he calls me right away?" I asked.

"That's up to you, old boy."

"Don't try to look so far ahead," said Fieldmorre solemnly. "Maybe there are other forces at work. You forget, don't you, such a thing as faith in the triumph of good?"

I stared embarrassedly. I surely never dreamed of Fieldmorre making parson talk. Yet when you dig down in man you never know what you're going to find.

Maybe I was mighty dense, but I hadn't seen it in that light. The whole thing appeared dominated by the maniac's idea of revenge.

I had never suspected in Fieldmorre any tendency to leave things—well, kind of sit

down in the mesquite and hope a burro'll come loping along with a keg of water. If there was trouble coming my instinct was to go right out and meet it.

"I think I know what you mean, Fieldy," said Billy. "Not to get all het up about it, as they say. Stall, as I advise, and if necessary we'll face the music."

"Guess you're right," said I a bit despondently.

But there's some kink in my make-up which doesn't like stalling. I knew it was wise, but I just didn't like it. Too bull-headed, as Billy once put it when bawling me out. But the —— of it was that the whole thing was up to me—the least able of the three, I knew well, to handle such a touchy outfit. Fieldmorre worried me too; kind of felt that there was something in him I hadn't known.

In the middle of my brooding I suddenly recollected that I'd clean forgotten about Sabah. Billy swore.

"It's my fault," said Fieldmorre apologetically. "I should have known."

"How the —— could you?" demanded Billy. "Just as much mine, for I'd have backed him right through."

"He probably suffered quite a lot, poor ——," added Fieldmorre; "torn between his conscience and his religion."

"Mighty lucky he didn't get us murdered by the Tuareg bunch," said I, and there we let the matter drop.

"Here, I'm jolly hungry," commented Fieldmorre. "Have you fed? No?"

He spoke in Arabic to the negro squatting in attendance just outside the door, who in turn shouted to another to bring food.

WE BEGAN to compare notes. Fieldmorre had been taken asleep and Billy as well. From the sound of the shouts and yells they reckoned that some of the boys had put up a fight, but they had never seen any of them since. In fact, until their arrival at the city of Melle they had been isolated. Each had the same story to relate of very courteous treatment by various village sheiks during the journey by camel.

Why we had been permitted to join here we couldn't guess. Perhaps I had luckily mostly spoken of them as my friends, or maybe our captors had acted on Sabah's information.

"Say," said I suddenly, "you fellows got any guns on you?"

"Guess again, old son!" snapped Billy.

Throughout most of the night, aided by innumerable glasses of tea, which the negro at the door supplied, we discussed the situation from every angle we could think of, but we couldn't arrive at any workable plan. We tried to figure out what had happened to Vèron, Hardwicke and the other men. As we had been treated so well we concluded that they at any rate hadn't yet been injured. We turned in about two and pretended to sleep—at least I did.

The idea that this fiend would torture them all for revenge upon me made me physically sick. I felt icy, like a fellow with the gripes. I got up.

"I'll be back in a moment," I said, and went outside.

There was no one around apparently, and I sat on the edge of the tiled veranda with my head in my hands.

My head had never seemed so woolly. Without arms, not a single gun even, we stood no chance to break loose. This maniac of a Gandhi had us utterly in his power.

I thought of wild schemes of making the darned cobra bite him. But how? And what good would it do? His fanatical followers would do for us mighty quick.

Where were the other fellows? Vèron, Hardwicke and the rest? If we could get arms and get together we could at least put up a scrap for it; but here we were like a parcel of darned sheep waiting to be driven to the slaughter-house.

Then I shuddered again as there came the early call to prayer just before dawn:

"*—la ilaha illa 'llaha wa Mo-ham—med er ras-ul Alla-hi-il*"

I swore. The recollection of those years when I had been forced to listen to that cry made me wince still.

And now? That insane megalomaniac was quite capable of torturing my friends slowly before me as he had threatened, and of keeping me alive to torture for years in mind as well as body.

I stared angrily into the darkness. 'Way down below I caught a glimpse of the lake. For a moment something that seemed luminous startled me.

I stood up, staring over the water. At first I thought that it was one of the sacred pythons swimming on the surface, but then

I recollected that the water was fresh. Oh, fireflies of course!

I sat down. Then I bounded to my feet. In a flash an idea had jumped into my head. I ran into the room calling softly:

"Billy! Fieldy!"

"Hullo, what's the matter?"

"What in ——"

"Sssh! Have either of you got any of those English matches—vestas?"

"Lord!" muttered Billy. "He's gone loco too."

"I have, Tromp, I think," murmured Fieldmorre. "But what on earth d'you want matches for?"

"Thank the good Lord," I responded. "By glory, we've got a chance then. Get up, you fellows!"

"Nutty!" said Billy rudely.

But I insisted, and explained my plan to them.

"By the Lord," admitted Billy, "it'll give us a fighting chance anyway. I never knew you had any brains before, you great big slab of beef!"

"Here," whispered Fieldmorre as I was busy on my face and hands. "Go barefoot. Tracks'll look more like a slave's."

"You fellows must be sure to get the others for the sake of ammunition, and follow the trees down the terraces to the right of the lake," said I. "Do I look all right?"

"Sure," assured Billy. "Like a darned banshee. Come on. Get busy; the dawn's coming."

As we stole out into the gardens the cry of the *muezzin* was still wailing. According to plan, Billy and Fieldy made a détour to the left while I crept through a clump of bushes toward the sentries guarding the lake exit. As I approached, barefoot, I was "full of joy and gladness," as the Arabs say, to see the sentry, with his rifle leaning against a low bush beside him, standing facing the first glimmer of dawn, his hands raised in the first attitude of prayer. I caught him from behind.

He started to struggle, but at the sight of my phosphorescent war-paint he collapsed with a gurgling groan, surely convinced that Iblis had gotten him.

Swiftly slipping his bandoleer of cartridges off, I tapped him on the head with his rifle-butt, and ran back into the bushes. The whole thing had been so unexpectedly swift and noiseless that I regretted the agreement we had arranged for Fieldy and Billy to close with the others. However, they had watched me from the cover away along and were waiting for me.

"Bully!" whispered Billy. "Workmanlike job. Say, try it on the next guy. The guard must be farther along."

"You certainly do look like a ghost," muttered Fieldy with a trace of Irish superstition in his voice. "Quite glad I know who you are."

"Right!" said I. "But take the gun and let me have my hands clear. Ghosts don't carry rifles anyway."

We skirmished along, running from one clump of trees to another. Thirty yards away was another sentry engaged in similar pious exercises. But this fellow's faith couldn't have been so deep, for after the first grunt of surprize and dismay he fought like a fury, and before I could compress his windpipe he managed to squawk mighty loud. As I went off with his rifle and bandoleer I heard Billy whisper—

"Quick!"

A voice challenged some little way off.

"Get behind and club him while I amuse him," I whispered to Billy, handing over the second rifle.

The two scuttled as quietly as might be on their bare feet around a tall clump of grass. The sentry came strutting along with his rifle at the ready and turned at the slither of grass they had made. Then I stepped out, making passes with my phosphorescent hands in the air to attract his attention.

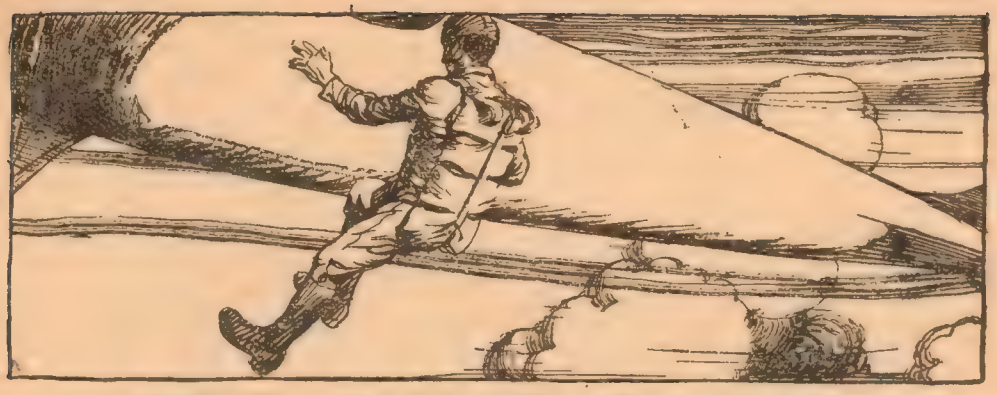
He saw me and stopped. For a moment I had an uneasy sensation in the pit of my stomach that he was going to fire point-blank. But he hesitated and demanded, with a quaver in his voice—

"*Ka ni?*" (Who's there?)

I could see Billy and Fieldy stalking him from behind, and began to make a rumbling noise to cover their approach, when there came from close by the call to prayer. By the time the long-drawn "*Al-ah-i-il*" was finished he was on his road to find out the truth of the assertion; for Billy, taking no chances, hit good and hard.

So far so good. We had now each a rifle —two Martinis and a Snider—with ammunition; and fortunately had not even given the alarum to the main guard if they had one.

TO BE CONCLUDED



# THE JUMP-BACK

## by THOMSON BURTIS

*Author of "The Winning Chance," "There and Back," etc.*

THE handling of an Air Service outfit frequently requires the guile of the heathen Chinee, the tact of a diplomat, and a post-graduate course in human nature, shaken up with large portions of uncommon sense. During the short but highly eventful life of the youngest branch of the Service many non-flying officers have attempted to handle a small group of flyers. Those that succeeded usually did so in spite of some of their military prejudices rather than because of army training.

The old line officers have raved and torn their hair over those —— flyers—their disciplinary slips, their ununderstandable vagaries. As a matter of fact, nobody resents the charge of "temperament" more than the airmen themselves and their flying officers.

Thoughts of this nature were running through the head of the stocky, brush-pompadoured man who was hunched down in a big chair in front of his desk. A huge black pipe of ungodly strength was clamped between his strong teeth, and his short, slightly bowed legs were resting across his desk. The man was Captain Kennard, in command of the McMullen flight of the Army Air Service border patrol.

Because he had entered the Air Service as a buck private, and fought his way into a cadetship, then to a second lieutenancy, and finished the job by collecting two boche planes, the D. S. C., and a captaincy overseas, Captain Kennard had a good start toward making an ideal commanding officer. Add to the above qualifications the fact that he was a little bit on the shady side of thirty, had wandered from Alaska to Chile following his profession as a civil engineer, and had ever been a keen observer of human nature both in the raw and in its shell, and you have before you the reasons why he was conceded to have the best outfit along the Rio Grande, which is saying something.

Right now, though, he was worried. His lined face, scarred by no less than twenty-three airplane wrecks, showed the trend of his thoughts plainly. Flying is an elusive thing—it is hard to say just when a man is getting too reckless, and next to impossible to tell when he is laying down on the job. That is one reason why flight surgeons, specially trained doctor-psychologists, are stationed with every Air Service outfit.

And yet neither old Major Searles, the McMullen flight surgeon, nor the captain could figure the change in Jimmy Jennings.

It was certain that he was getting too reckless, but he fought taking a leave as if thirty days' vacation at full pay were an insult. He was not stale—he flew too much in fact if he was allowed.

Captain Kennard realized that flyers, particularly those men who daily patrol the Rio Grande from Brownsville, Texas, to San Diego, California, are under a nervous strain that makes it imperative to most of them to play hard when they play, but Jimmy Jennings was now a veritable Man o' War in the wine, women and song handicap.

Of course any regulation of personal matters of that sort was something that Captain Kennard did not attempt directly—in fact he was wont to indulge in a reasonable amount of what he termed "gentlemanly

wassail" himself, on occasions—but the thing that was causing him so much mental turmoil as he sat with his eyes on the wall was a combination of peculiarities that seemed to have cropped out all at once in one of his best pilots. Most unexplainable of all was the changed attitude of the smiling, impulsive Jimmy, who had one time been the sunniest, most popular one of the dozen pilots and observers at McMullen.

Major Searles and the C. O. had often wondered whether Jimmy's wreck, months before, had caused one of those fictionally popular and actually possible brain reactions that changed a man's personality. And yet the change in Jennings had not manifested itself until months after the wreck—in fact it was only within the month that it had become noticeable.

For the hundredth time the short, thick-set little man who was charged with the care of a dozen, more or less, wild young flyers, and a hundred other men, reviewed the events in the recent career of his youngest pilot, striving to pick out something that would be a starting-point in his effort to explain, and, if possible, change back to normal, the apparently suicide-bent Jennings.

It was a sweltering Summer day, hot as it seems only Texas can get. The field, sand packed hard by the sun, was dazzling in the flood of white sunshine that bathed the panting border country in blinding light. The corrugated iron hangars on the eastern and western edges of the small airdrome were hot to the touch, and like ovens inside.

As the single De Haviland on the line burst into roaring life Jimmy arose from his seat by the window of the operations room, helmet and goggles in his hand.

"Work, work, work!" he sighed. "I wish I was a——"

"I don't see how you stand it, Jimmy," declared Binder, lolling on the desk. "I personally know of fully three hours' labor you've put in during the last two weeks, and yet you don't show the effects at all!"

"It's my iron constitution," grinned Jimmy.

He strolled languidly out the door into the blazing sunlight. He was a slim, boyish chap of medium height, and probably the nearest approach to the pictured aviator that ever really flew. His features were clean-cut and perfect, crowned by thick, curly black hair and given distinction and charm by sparkling dark eyes and an ever ready smile. He was a hard man to describe without making him appear almost effeminate, but as a matter of fact he was credited with four boches in the big scrap, was on duty at McMullen as official test pilot of the flight, and was as nervy and brilliant a pilot as the border patrol boasted.

He made his way slowly toward the warming ship, which had just been the recipient of a brand-new motor. He was going to give it a thorough test in the air before assigning it as one of the regular patrol ships. It had been run two hours on the ground as a preliminary, that morning.

Jimmy stood in the air-stream from the propeller as Sergeant Cary, in the cockpit, gradually opened the throttle wider. The rushing air was very pleasant in contrast with the lifeless heat that had baked all the vitality out of the McMullen men that day. Finally the motor was running wide open, and the pilot turned his back and leaned against the terrific force of the propeller blast. He listened to the motor with much satisfaction—it was hitting perfectly.

Gradually the roar lessened as the sergeant eased the throttle back slowly. Jimmy adjusted his headgear and climbed into the cockpit. Sergeant Cary climbed back to the rear seat to see to it that the belt was strapped in such a manner that it could not possibly catch in the controls. On test flights no passenger is taken—that law is as the laws of the Medes and Persians.

Jimmy gave the motor a thorough trial on the ground. He cut first one switch and then the other, listening closely for any sign of a miss on either. He advanced and retarded the spark, ran the motor wide open and then as low as it would idle, watching gages closely the while and striving to detect any error. Finally, satisfied, he adjusted his goggles and nodded to the men on the wings. Two of them crawled beneath the ship and dragged out the wheel-blocks.

He taxied slowly to the northern end of the field, in order to take all the room possible for the takeoff. As he turned his great plane into position he looked around quickly to make sure that neither of the patrol ships was on its way in for a landing. He noticed a truck lumbering along the road that skirted the southern edge of the field.

First making sure that the motor shutters were open, he slowly pushed on the throttle, going forward with the stick at the same time. The tail came up, and the ship sped

swiftly across the smooth ground. Fifty yards was sufficient to get flying speed, and the De Haviland lifted into the air. The pilot held it down a trifle to make certain of plenty of speed for a steep climb in the thin air.

Suddenly the thing happened that has sounded the death-knell for more flyers than any other single mishap in flying. The motor cut out on the takeoff.

In an instant every officer and man at McMullen, with that sputtering of horrible significance sounding in their ears, leaped for doors and windows.

The ship was ten feet high—and almost directly in front of it was the truck, holding two enlisted men besides the driver. In a split second the two alternatives flashed into Jimmy's mind. Straight ahead—he would crash through the truck, land in the rough ground beyond the road, and probably would do nothing more than nose up, or possibly turn over completely.

Without hesitation he lived up to the creed of the Air Service, which reads that the people on the ground come first. He jerked back on the stick, and then jammed it to the right, ruddering at the same time. The ship, barely missing the truck, hovered for a second and then crashed to the ground in a crackling, twisted, dust-blurred mass.

They succeeded in dragging the limp form of Jimmy Jennings from beneath the wreckage, although Binder and Captain Kennard were burned rather badly doing it.

AS HE sat there in the office the events of that day were as clear in the captain's mind as though they had happened the day before. He thought of the fight they had made for Jimmy's life, which had finally been saved by means of a delicate operation performed by Major Sutton, from San Antonio, who had flown down to McMullen with Jerry Carter, of the Department Headquarters flight.

There had followed six long months of invalidism for Jimmy. Most of that time must have been a nightmare for the young pilot—his leg had been encased in a weighted cast and suspended in the air for two months, and the pain for a while was really very bad.

The little C. O. got to his feet and began pacing the office with slow strides. Outside, in the adjutant's sanctum, he could hear "Pop" Cravath, the middle-aged but fiery assistant to the C. O., telling the orderly what he thought of a man that didn't have brains enough to get the telephone number and identity of any person making a telephone call when he, the adjutant, was out.

It would have been more natural if Jimmy had gone stale—lost his nerve—after the wreck and his long siege of bedridden misery, but instead of that he had become the most appallingly reckless flyer the captain had ever seen. And worse than that, there was a new spirit discernible in the formerly blithe, sunny youngster who had been rather in the nature of the infant prodigy of McMullen.

There was no way for the captain, wise as he was in the ways of flyers, to know that the real reason for Jimmy's new attitude toward flying in particular and everything in general was the direct result of something that the C. O. had discarded at the start, in his pondering over the situation.

It had been the first bad wreck for Jennings. He had had many crashes, of course, but never had been badly hurt himself. During the long months on his back he had thought but little of it, but as the time approached for him to resume flying once more he was conscious of fear of the air. Time and time again, as he watched the other pilots sideslip in, zoom, or even wingturn he had unconsciously held his breath for a moment, and been conscious of a feeling of relief when they finally landed safely.

It had not bothered him greatly, however, until he finally went up with wise, conservative Mallory, the most experienced pilot in the outfit. He was assigned to ride with Jimmy the first few times to make sure that the brilliant young flyer had the feel of the ship after his long layoff. Jimmy stepped into the front cockpit that day with loathing for the big De Haviland, and he was barely able to control the nervousness that seemed about to overcome him.

That first half-hour in the air had been horrible. Every bump had caused him to jump nervously, and the slight vibration of several of the wires had assumed the importance of a life-and-death matter.

He had lost his nerve.

Being the kind of man he was, it had resulted in many things. Mallory rode with him on his trips around the field for three days, and every waking moment of those days was a nightmare to Jimmy. Bitterly he cursed himself as a yellow dog, and day

by day he drove himself into flying, but with no lessening of the fear that gripped him every moment he was in the air. Finally he was checked off by Mallory, and could fly alone once more.

He walked out to his ship for his first patrol with face white as chalk and his lips a thin line. He was going to fly the eastward patrol to the Gulf of Mexico, and he had determined to shake himself loose from his fear of the air or die in the attempt. "Pop" Cravath was his observer.

He taxied to the end of the field, and turned. Then he jammed on the throttle with what amounted to a physical effort, for the trip ahead was a nightmare to him. With teeth clamped together and eyes glowing in terrible determination he held his pulsing ship within two feet of the ground until the wires loomed close ahead. There was barely space enough between the poles for a ship to go through, and not more than six feet clearance vertically. Almost sick with fear, but with all the masterly skill in flying that was his, Jimmy sent the ship between two poles and underneath the wires, zooming terrifically as the plane flashed through.

Cravath, in the rear seat, was as a man petrified that day. All the smugglers in the world could have been having a convention along the Rio Grande without his knowing it. Jimmy never got over fifty feet high over all that desolate hundred miles. With the Liberty roaring wide open and every strut and wire vibrating with the strain he skimmed the tree-tops for two solid hours. He had no confidence in those quivering, thin trailing edges along the wings—he thought of all the complicated mechanism of a motor and was sure that his was going bad at any moment, and yet with savage determination he held to his reckless way.

He looked forward with dread to making a landing back at McMullen—the field was small and if he overshot there was that rough land that would turn him over. Consequently with bitter self-contempt mingling with stark fear he dived over the fence at a hundred miles an hour and then kicked the ship into a terrific, twisting skid that nearly broke the fuselage. It blew Cravath's goggles completely around, and the side-blast of the air made him lose his breath for a moment. Jimmy held the skid until the last second, then kicked out and landed just short of the boundary line. And the tragedy of it was that he was as yellow as ever after it was all over.

Day after day it was the same story. Sometimes beads of sweat broke out on Jimmy's face as he deliberately broke a War Department order to stunt wildly the frail De Havilands, but he kept on. He would conquer himself or else go the limit trying to. No matter how good a time he was having on the ground, few minutes went by without a wave of depression sweeping over him as he thought, "I'm yellow!'

He started trying to get drunk enough to forget the self-contempt that was literally gnawing into all that was pleasant in his life. Knowing nothing of the fact that they were watching a man trying to break himself as he would an outlaw horse, all McMullen, and whatsoever visitors happened along, watched in half-admiring, half-angry, wholly thrilled wonder at the breath-taking recklessness of Jimmy's flying.

They would have been surprized out of a year's growth had they known that every minute of it was torture to him.

Finally Pop Cravath was the only man who would ride with him. In that statement is a thumbnail sketch of the middle-aged observer that is as revealing as pages of analytical description.

Time after time Captain Kennard called Jimmy up to talk to him about his flying, but there was a subtle difference in the handsome airman that went further than the feverishly bright eyes and haggard face. He was quiet and respectful as always, but the captain had a feeling that there was a hardness beneath the surface that he could not penetrate at all.

It was part and parcel of the change that had made Jennings a new kind of man—a brooding, quick-tempered, savagely self-contemptuous being who was as different from the laughing young flyer McMullen had known as night is from day.

IT WAS two weeks after the captain's long reverie in his office, and the whole commissioned personnel of the flight, except Jennings, were lolling nonchalantly on the steps of the recreation building. It was five o'clock in the afternoon, and pleasantly cool.

"As a matter of cold fact, I'm willing to admit I don't look forward with any degree of pleasure to leaping into the ozone with

a pack on my back," stated Tex MacDowell, whose long legs were hanging over the low railing while the tall flyer lay flat.

"Me either. As a daredevil I am not there," agreed little Pete Miller.

"I'm going to make a parachute jump just to satisfy myself that I've got nerve enough to do it," said Mallory, a short, blond chap who could show over two thousand hours in the air registered in his pilot book.

"When are they due to arrive?" inquired Binder of the world at large.

His lanky form was draped carelessly along the veranda railing.

"Sergeant Curran will finish the parachute course at the Mechanics' School in two weeks," replied Captain Kennard, who was squatting on his heels against the wall. "He'll bring down a few 'chutes with him. Jimmy Jennings has applied to make the first jump."

"Shoot, a jump will have no thrills for that crazy loon," drawled Tex. "He'll probably wait to open it till he gets about even with a hangar, just to give himself a kick."

"You've got a —— of a lot to say about crazy flying," jeered Pop Cravath, who was sitting dignifiedly in a chair.

The tall Texan grinned at the adjutant.

"Alongside you, Pop, I'm a faded lily. It's not bad to take a few chances on your own hook, but when a man rides with Jimmy Jennings the way he's been going lately——"

"Did you see him bounce his wheels off the hangar top today?" Major Searles broke in to inquire.

"No. Did he do that?" demanded the C. O.

The major nodded soberly. For a moment silence fell over the gathering. It was not the wild flying of their young fellow pilot that bothered them so much—it was the change in him that was responsible for his absence right then, for instance. A dozen times a day things were happening that showed conclusively that Jimmy was not himself, and he was deliberately placing an ever-widening gulf between himself and the rest of the flight.

"Well, as for me, I'd a —— of a lot rather be the oldest flyer in the army than the best one," observed Binder.

"Rather have 'em say 'he *is* a fair pilot' than 'he *was* a bear,' eh?" grinned Tex.

"Right. And you'd better take my words to heart, too, Tex. You're no chauffeur to carry conservative passengers."

"Hello, we have callers," announced Captain Kennard.

"Tell 'em to leave their cards," remarked Binder, refusing even to raise his head from the railing to look at the automobile that was approaching in a cloud of fine dust.

"Looks like the mayor of McMullen," said Pete Miller. "There's a couple of the fair sex with him, too."

The car drew up to the steps, and the huge, black-sombrero-topped form of the Honorable Sam Edwards, old-time border man and present chief executive of McMullen, slid out from behind the steering-wheel.

"Wake up, you lazy aviators, and meet the people," he boomed jovially.

Captain Kennard came down the steps, the others following him slowly.

The three men and one rather stunning young woman in the car looked at them interestedly. It was a tanned, out-of-doors looking group of young men that they saw, dressed exactly alike in boots, breeches and O. D. shirts open at the neck.

"Captain Kennard, meet Mr. Salvain, Mr. D'Armond, Mr. Slater and Miss Marjorie Mason," said the mayor impressively. "These folks, gentlemen, are the big bugs of the Greater Pictures Corporation, and they have arrived in McMullen to shoot some scenes in a picture."

The mayor rolled out that technical phrase, "shoot some scenes," with relish, and then proceeded to introduce the other flyers. Salvain, it proved, was the director. He was a distinguished-looking, portly man with thinning brown hair and a rather nervous manner. Jefferson D'Armond, according to the mayor's impressive introduction, was the famous legitimate actor who was the star of the company. Slater was just a common or garden variety of moving-picture character man.

Last, but not least, came Miss Marjorie Mason, leading woman in support of the tall, gray-haired D'Armond. The flyers admired her blond, doll-like prettiness with unanimous pleasure. She did the ingénue stuff very well, too, and little Pete Miller, notoriously prone to fall before the charms of woman, was really thrilled when she squeezed his hand and told him she thought flying was wonderful.

"These folks are going to do a lot to advertise McMullen," announced the mayor, "And while they're here, which'll be a couple of weeks, we aim to give 'em a good time."

"We're shooting some stuff for our first venture under the Greater Pictures name," explained Salvain to the group of airmen. "It's a good Western, just fits Mr. D'Armond, and McMullen is ideal for the outdoor stuff we want. Our main studio is in San Antonio."

"These boys here, folks, fly the border patrol every day to see that the spigs don't smuggle so much liquor across that the price'll fall," explained the mayor with a wink. "While you're here you'll see 'em at work."

"It's marvelous, sir, marvelous," declared Slater, a pudgy, jovial-looking man dressed in a light Palm Beach suit. "I've never gotten over my wonder at flying."

"And this border patrol—why, it's the Old West stuff—I never thought we'd meet twentieth-century riders of the border line," put in Salvain enthusiastically.

"Mr. Edwards has just been telling us about you all. I think it's perfectly marvelous—wonderful!" enthused the toothsome Miss Mason, her wide blue eyes wandering from one flyer to the other. Tex McDowell turned away slightly to hide the twitching of his lips.

Jimmy Jennings strolled up to the group, unnoticed until he reached them. He had been trying to take a nap in his tent, but, as always, sleep failed him and the weary moments passed in hopeless self-condemnation. His shirt was open at the throat, and his crisply curling black hair was in wild disorder. The sensitive face was pale, and there were dark circles very apparent under his eyes.

"Miss Mason, Jimmy Jennings," the honorable Mr. Edwards shouted as soon as he saw Jimmy. "And Mr. Salvain, Mr. Slater and Mr. D'Armond."

Jimmy took one look into the round blue eyes of the ravishing Miss Mason and fell so far into their depths that there was no hope of escape therefrom. He did not detect the hint of hardness and sophistication that a keen observer would have noticed in the superficially beautiful face.

The airmen conducted the movie people around the airdrome, showing them the ships, machine shop, and various other accessories to the flying game that were new and interesting to their guests. Jimmy was always at Miss Mason's elbow, with Pete Miller a close second on the other side, and both young gentlemen fell for Miss Mason's line of flattery, hook, line and sinker.

They were both young enough to feel thrilled at the idea of being on friendly terms with a well-known actress, and unsophisticated enough to believe that she meant all that she said. The other flyers laid themselves out to entertain the visitors. There was the prospect of a pleasant interlude in the placid current of life in McMullen, and before the quartet of show people departed Captain Kennard's proposal that a dance be given in honor of the company was adopted enthusiastically.

The airdrome possessed the best place for a dance within forty miles—an unused hangar that lent itself readily to unusual schemes of decoration with the additional advantage of privacy so pronounced that a dance until dawn disturbed nobody.

"Wait until you see these boys fly," boomed the jovial mayor, who was in his element. The group had returned to the car after covering the more interesting exhibits the airdrome had to offer.

"They may be a little more interested in the parachute-jumping," said Captain Kennard.

He looked over at Jennings, who was helping Miss Mason into the car.

"Jimmy there is going to make the first jump as soon as the 'chutes arrive from Donovan Field."

Miss Mason shivered and sent a disabling glance from her long-lashed eyes into Jimmy's brown ones.

"I don't see how on earth you can do it!" she said.

Jimmy's pleasure in her comment was spoiled completely in the sickening surge of fear that came over him at the thought of jumping. He had asked to jump first for the same reason that he forced himself into his appallingly reckless flying feats, but the mere prospect of that leap into space filled him with nauseating fright that made him almost physically ill.

"Just plain, ordinary yellow," he lashed himself bitterly as he watched the car roll away.

For the moment the fact that he had a date with Miss Mason for dinner that

evening was forgotten—when he remembered what a spineless coward he was there was nothing on earth that he could enjoy.

THE next few days found flyers and the movie people becoming very well acquainted. The dance, attended by the élite of Hidalgo County, was a great success. Mr. Joe Falsworth, cameraman, got somewhat spifflicated, due to the unusually generous supply of liquor, and various others were not far behind him. However, under the careful supervision of Captain Kennard and various lenient but experienced chaperons drawn from McMullen, the party, as Tex MacDowell put it, was "snappy, but clean."

Every evening found some of the flyers fraternizing with their new-found acquaintances. Jimmy Jennings never missed a night. He was like a shadow for Marjorie Mason, and he spent entirely too much money for dinners, automobiles and beverages that were distinctly intoxicating.

Matters were at this pass when Tex wandered into Captain Kennard's tent one cool evening just at dusk. He found the captain and Major Searles about to imbibe a drink of some precious cognac that the captain had supplied himself with overseas.

"Have a drink, Tex," the captain greeted him. "It's the major's birthday."

"Have 'em oftener, major," drawled the tall flyer, smacking his lips appreciatively after drinking to the flight surgeon's health.

He eased himself down on the bed and rolled a cigaret expertly.

"Captain, there's a little something I wanted to chin with you about—maybe the major'd like to talk it over, too. I hate like —— to butt in, but somehow or other I figure Jimmy needs sort of a guardian right now."

The captain nodded, his homely but attractive face unwontedly serious.

"I'm floored about Jimmy," he admitted. "I don't know what in —— ails him, and I can't find out. Have you got anything definite, Tex?"

"Not especially, but it may be. He's hanging on the skirts of this Marjorie Mason, you know—nice girl, I guess, and —— good looking, but he's due to get burnt, I believe. That isn't the thing, though—that's strictly his own affair, of course. I guess a man has to learn all about food-pups by experience."

"Surely the well-known Miss Mason isn't a lunch-hound?" grinned the captain.

"Maybe not—certainly not any piker at it anyway. But what I was going to tell you was this. Jimmy has been getting pretty drunk with that gang just about every night—mostly on liquor he's bought himself. They've been gambling a lot, and I know for a fact that right now Jimmy hasn't got a nickel and owes three hundred at the bank besides. I've been up there a couple of times, and tried to protect his hand by staying along, and laying down to him once in a while if I was ahead.

"Which you usually are, I presume," grinned Major Searles.

"Sometimes," agreed Tex, whose ability as a poker player was admitted without argument by anybody who had risked any money against him. "But here's the meat of the thing. He's gambling like he's flying—no sense. And when that cameraman, Falsworth, got so drunk at the dance and I took him home he dropped some remarks that made me think he might be rooking the troops. I watched him pretty close, and if he is, he's clever as ——. They play dealer's choice. Falsworth always deals stud, and I believe what he's doing is this: He remembers the five cards he had in his hand just before his deal, and puts 'em on top. Then he shuffles without disturbing those five, and cuts twice. Let me show you."

Tex glanced at the five cards on top of the deck of cards that were on the table, and shuffled them rapidly. Had they not been watching they would not have noticed that the five cards on top were not disturbed.

"Then he cuts like this," MacDowell went on, and cut half the deck off the bottom and placed those cards on top, a trifle forward of the rest of the deck. Then he cut about twenty cards out of the middle, placing them on top. By means of the little shelf he had left between the two halves of the deck it was easy to see that the original twenty cards that had been on top of the deck at the start were there at the end of the shuffle.

"Of course I did it slowly, but it's a cinch to do it fast," Tex told his two interested auditors, and his long fingers demonstrated it conclusively.

"Then he holds the deck in his hand, everybody having seen his own double cut, and holds it toward Jimmy, who has been

playing at his right in both games I've seen. 'Cut again?' he'll ask, and Jimmy always says no—almost anybody would in one of these friendly games. Then he deals out, and having remembered the top cards knows what every man's hole-card is. Get the idea?"

"A —— good one, too," stated the captain. "If nobody has much up to the third or fourth card he can make a big raise and take the pot—if they have him hopelessly beaten he can drop."

"Sure. And the beauty of the —— thing is that he's offered a cut, and that nobody in the world can actually swear that he's crooked. You see he don't make any attempt to stack the deck to give himself anything, and if you watched him do it forty times you'd really have no basis for publicly branding him a crook—no evidence at all, and you couldn't prove it hadn't been an accident." Major Searles nodded slowly.

"I'm not much of a gambler, but it strikes me as being very good," he opined. "Jimmy should be warned."

"Exactly. And I can't do it," said Tex.

The two other men glanced at him quickly. He was watching a smoke ring, his gray eyes half hidden by lowered lids. They waited silently for an explanation.

"Jimmy has sort of got it in for me now," Tex went on at length, "on account of this girl proposition. What the —— has been biting him for the last month, ever since he started flying again, I don't know, but anyway he's got a bad case of puppy love."

"I didn't know you were any rival for her affections," said the puzzled C. O.

"I'm not—so you could notice it. I hate to talk about a lady, but being among friends maybe you'll excuse me. The size of the matter is that she's been sort of on my trail, captain, the last few days, and Jimmy knows it. Oh, it's not my fatal beauty or anything like that," he grinned as he met the captain's dancing eyes.

He looked over at the major, who was smiling likewise.

"Did you rounders, wise in the ways of the world, ever think that maybe Miss Marjorie Mason wasn't quite as young and fluffy and baby-vamplike as she looks?" he inquired.

"She knows enough to get along, all right," admitted the captain.

"The way I've got it figured—I may be wrong—is that, judging from the conversation of Sheriff Bill Trowbridge, Mayor Edwards, and some other folks around here that know my dad pretty well, she's got an exaggerated idea of how much money he's got and all that stuff. Salvain, who seems to be a pretty good egg, told me that Edwards was telling him how dad owned about half of Texas. Of course dad *isn't* in danger of starving to death, and I just figured that maybe Miss Mason thought she had a pretty good prospect in me, if you know what I mean.

"It's a sort of a funny thing to say, but it's the only way I can account for my sudden popularity with her. I haven't played her a bit—wouldn't have done it if I'd wanted to, on account of Jimmy, who's no *hombre* to fool with right now. But she's given him the none-too-gentle go-by every time I've been around, lately, and Jimmy wouldn't listen to me for love nor money. So I thought maybe you'd like to jazz around to the hotel some time right soon, captain, look over the land, and maybe put Jimmy wise. I think D'Armond and Salvain and Slater and that young Geoffry Saxe are all right on the gambling, but I'm —— certain Falsworth isn't."

"I will—tonight," stated the C. O. "I'd give a lot to know what ails Jimmy."

"I believe he's worried about something. He isn't himself, that's a cinch," Tex said slowly. "He's looking bad as ——, stays by himself too much, and has just about as much balance as a jack-rabbit. They say this love does that to a man, but he had that before."

The elderly major smiled at MacDowell's casual reference to the effects of the tender passion, and then his face became serious.

"I've wondered whether it could be something at home, but he answers indifferently that his mother is all right—his father is dead, you know, and he has no other close relatives. There's a really terrible spirit about his wildness, flying and otherwise. It isn't the effervescence of youth and vitality, like some of your escapades——"

Tex, admitted to be the best flyer along the border, gave one of his rare chuckles.

"Do I appear to stew with the said——" he started when the captain interrupted.

"You're just a plain —— fool who pines for excitement, and is just about due for an overdose of it some day," he declared.

The captain did not relish MacDowell's

disposition deliberately to seek out opportunities to satisfy his love of fighting against odds and pitting himself against circumstances or persons with blithe disregard of possible consequences to himself. George Hickman, MacDowell's observer, swore that when a ship was running all right Tex was quiet and uninterested, but that when a sudden emergency arose his gray eyes began to glow and he became the personification of joyous interest.

"I believe the son-of-a-gun enjoys a forced landing," George said one time.

Right now Tex grinned boyishly at his two superiors. He had the indefinable air of a man who has been through much, met many different kinds of people, and emerged with the unobtrusive ease and confidence begotten of experience, and yet there were streaks of boyish devil-may-careness that cropped out now and then, which seemed to provide a totally different side to his personality.

"Well, you psychologists can take up my case later," he remarked. "But as you say, major, Jimmy is a different man now. He never has been a conservative flyer, from what you say, nor a candidate for honors as a model of propriety, but right now he seems trying to tear himself apart, and isn't even enjoying the process himself."

The captain glanced at his watch.

"Well, if I'm going down to call on the bunch at the hotel I must get washed, polished and highly perfumed immediately, if not sooner. Have another drink before I put it back in the safe."

"I hear the parachutes are due tomorrow," remarked Tex as he poured himself some of the precious liquid.

"Uh-huh. First jump'll be Saturday afternoon. The whole town wants to turn out to see it."

"Jimmy's going to jump, I suppose?"

"Yes, he got in first application."

"I wish I had," said Tex, his frame filling the doorway of the tent. "I can't wait to jump, just to prove to myself I've got the nerve to do it. Well, good luck, cap'n. Hope you can save Jimmy some dough tonight. Even if that game wasn't crooked, he'd lose. He's gambling like he's flying, and money won't hold out at that sort of thing as long as ships."

"And I'm afraid Jimmy won't hold out as long as either," remarked the kind old major seriously.

MISS MARJORIE MASON—once upon a time Mrs. James Withee, wife of a cheap stock actor—had not always been as wise as she was when McMullen grew to know her. The underlying sophistication and hard calculation that Tex and Captain Kennard believed they saw beneath the surface had come within the last two years—rather lean years they had been, comparatively.

She did not flatter herself when she looked in the mirror of mornings—it would be only too soon when the fatal close-ups would be no longer possible for her. Her thirty years were beginning to show a trifle to her expert eye. She had never been a star, and she had a fixed idea that probably it would be very hard for her to find a lucrative engagement after she finished with the D'Armond picture.

The Greater Pictures Corporation was new and struggling, formed to exploit D'Armond, and the wise leading woman had her doubts as to the ability of the star to win any great success for himself in pictures. He was a little on the down-grade, likewise. A certain amount of intimacy with D'Armond, extending over several years at intervals, plus her willingness to accept a salary much below what moving-picture actresses usually receive, and miles below what the public thinks they receive, had been the deciding factors in her engagement, and the wise Miss Mason knew it.

For some time she had fully entertained the belief that it was up to her to snare herself a husband of means and a certain amount of tractability. Somehow or other she had missed the one or two reasonably good chances that had come her way. She enjoyed the adoration of men like Jimmy Jennings, without for a second considering any sentimental feelings. She had been cured of that foolishness long before.

During the course of frequent conversations with McMullenites, particularly old-timers like Sheriff Bill Trowbridge and the mayor, she had heard much of Tex MacDowell and his achievements. Far more interesting, however, were the casual remarks as to the wealth and influence of MacDowell senior, a rollicking old-timer of the Southwest who, as "Roaring Bill" MacDowell, had fought his way into considerable prominence in North Texas.

Miss Mason had decided that perhaps to be the blushing bride of Tex would be a

very fine state of affairs, and she had entertained but little doubt of her success in handling the supposedly young and impressionable flyer. Jimmy Jennings got a few crums from her hand—enough to fan the flame of his desire. In his overwrought condition he was fiercely jealous of his lady-love's propensity for MacDowell's society, and yet he seemed helpless to shake off her influence over him when it was plain that oftentimes she almost snubbed him.

Captain Kennard, watching her in the intervals of the poker game, was judging her rather harshly, although he did not suspect how far her plans went. It was plain, however, that Jimmy was merely in the nature of a temporary slave to have on call. The young flyer was looking rather worse than usual—his pallor was noticeable and he was drinking too much of the liquor he had brought along for the occasion.

They were playing in the sitting-room of a suite shared by D'Armond and Salvain. D'Armond was out, and Captain Kennard, Jennings, Salvain and Falsworth were the only players. Falsworth was a little chap with bright beady eyes and a chin that was blue despite close shaving. A cigaret always hung from the corner of his mouth.

Jimmy was playing in luck that night. Due to the small number of players, the game was straight stud poker, and the reckless betting of the young flyer was coming out fortunately. He seemed to have the luck of the —— himself in catching a hand on the last card. The other men, who had grown accustomed to his wild betting on nothing, usually stayed along if they had half a chance, so Jimmy was a couple of hundred dollars ahead. The game was a little steep for the crowd, Kennard judged.

Close watching of the cameraman confirmed MacDowell's description of his methods. However, his crooked work was not doing him much good against Jimmy's luck, and Captain Kennard hoped to be able to last out the evening without taking any definite steps. Then he could tell Jimmy quietly what was happening and persuade him to stop gambling with Falsworth.

Marjorie Mason was watching the game idly, smoking a continuous stream of cigarets, and drinking a trifle too much. By ten o'clock she was flushed and noisy, and persisted in interfering with the game and telling every player just what mistakes he had made. D'Armond came in while she was leaning over the table showing Captain Kennard what a poor poker player he was.

The tall, hawk-nosed actor had evidently been drinking likewise. He put his arm around her shoulders carelessly, leaning over beside her. His fingers strayed up and down her cheek.

With a snarl of rage Jimmy leaped to his feet and jerked the astonished star back from the table by his coat collar. Then he planted a hefty right swing to the jaw that sent D'Armond to the floor.

Before the astounded onlookers could interfere D'Armond got to his feet and met the flyer's rush. For a moment fists flew, and then Captain Kennard got Jimmy from behind and jerked him back.

"Let me go, —— it!" snarled the crazed flyer, and struggled viciously. He got an arm free and with a sweeping blow at his C. O.'s face tried to knock him away.

There was a surprizing amount of strength hidden in the captain's stocky form. With a wickedly tight grip on each of Jimmy's wrists he brought the pilot to his knees, choking back a cry of pain. Salvain and young Geoffry Saxe, juvenile of the company who had just come in, were holding D'Armond.

"Get up, you young fool!" snapped the captain, and jerked Jimmy to his feet.

"I greatly regret that this occurred, Mr. D'Armond," he said quietly to the actor.

Marjorie was wiping away the blood from D'Armond's face.

"Jennings here is drunk, and not responsible," continued the captain. "If you'll excuse me, I'll see that he gets home."

Jennings obeyed his commanding officer as if in a daze, and stumbled out of the door without a word, the captain following.

THE small airdrome was literally rimmed with cars and people on foot. It seemed as if everybody in McMullen must be there. It was Saturday afternoon, and the first parachute jump ever staged at McMullen was to be done by Jimmy Jennings. There would be only one jump that afternoon, but sooner or later every flyer would take a jump as a sort of rehearsal for some emergency.

Jimmy stood silently just inside the door of a hangar as Sergeant Curran, who had just finished the course in parachute-folding and other technical features of the big umbrellas at the Mechanics' School, finished

adjusting the 'chutes. As was the rule of the Air Service, two of the 'chutes were to be worn, one on his back and the other strapped to his chest. Out on the line Captain Kennard's De Haviland was warming up. A step had been adjusted on the side of the fuselage, outside the rear cockpit, from which Jimmy would make his jump.

The pilot was in a pitiable condition, though he succeeded in masking his utter misery and naked fear to a certain extent. His pallid face was drawn and haggard, and the great dark eyes, rimmed with deep circles of blue, glowed with a feverish light, He was at the point of breaking.

The days since his fight with D'Armond had been more awful than the ones preceding that night, if that were possible. He blamed Captain Kennard for treating him like a small boy in front of the movie people, particularly Marjorie. The captain himself had lost patience with the vagaries of the man who had once been one of the best-liked men in the flight. Jimmy was a self-made pariah, and knew it. Add to that the torture that he underwent in flying, and the self-loathing that filled him as he admitted himself a yellow coward, and it was no wonder that he was scarcely rational that day.

He had not even seen the people of the Greater Pictures Corporation since that night. He had brooded over his humiliation before them until the mere idea of seeing one of them flooded his pallid face with hot embarrassment.

He walked slowly toward the ship, which was now running wide open in the final warm-up. Captain Kennard, who was to fly with him, was talking with Mayor Edwards, his helmet already strapped and goggles pushed up on his head. Jimmy scarcely heard the applause that came from the packed onlookers as he walked toward the ship. Right then he felt as though he were literally walking to his death, but he would not have drawn back for any conceivable reward. Why live, hating and despising one's self for all that was yellow?

Up above the airdrome a De Haviland banked and wing-turned lazily. Tex MacDowell was flying it, carrying a cameraman for a movie weekly. As Jimmy mechanically climbed in the back cockpit of Captain Kennard's ship, now idling smoothly, several McMullen officers came forward.

"You're sure the little belle of the ball this afternoon, Jimmy," Pop Cravath yelled to him.

Jimmy essayed an answering smile that was a rank failure. He stood up in the cockpit as Captain Kennard climbed in the front and strapped himself. Jennings fastened the big, free-swinging observer's belt around him, and then leaned hopelessly over the machine-gun scarf mount. The belt was loose enough to permit an observer to stand up and get good visibility in all directions. Captain Kennard turned and looked into the burning eyes so close to his own with a long, level scrutiny.

"All ready?" he asked finally.

Jimmy nodded, wetting his lips.

The crowd settled into expectant silence as the ship taxied to the end of the airdrome and took off with a sudden roar. Probably every person there shuddered—at least mentally—at the thought of what was to come. Even Marjorie Mason, in a car over in the corner, felt a thrill of admiration for the nerve of her young admirer. No one suspected that not a person in the crowd could have been closer to collapse than the man who filled the thoughts of all those onlookers as the plane circled ever higher.

The ship was a half-mile north of the airdrome, three thousand feet high, when Captain Kennard throttled down and looked back at Jimmy. He nodded briefly.

Jimmy for a moment was literally paralyzed. He did not dare to look down at the tiny square that was the airdrome. At length he forced himself to loosen his belt, and with a deathly grip on the iron scarf mounting that ran around the rear cockpit he slowly climbed over the side until he was standing on the little step, his back to the empty air behind him. He fought the terrific air blast with lowered head. Not once had he looked below.

The ship was now over the southern edge of the airdrome. The light wind was southeast from the Gulf, so the jump was to be made somewhat south of the field, in order that the drift would carry the jumper either to the airdrome or into the fields north of it. One of the greatest dangers in jumping is that the man will hit buildings, wires, or whatnot when nearing the ground.

With his hand on the throttle the captain looked back. Two hundred feet above them, just beneath a fleecy white cloud, the other ship could be seen, with the cameraman

grinding rapidly, his camera pointed at the ship below.

Slowly the throttle came back, and Jimmy's finger found the ring of the ripcord. Then the throttle was completely cut, and Captain Kennard pulled the nose high in the air, almost completely stalling the ship. The speedometer showed only forty-five miles an hour.

Looking back at it, Jimmy believes that he almost fainted off into the air that day. He toppled backward off the step, as though in a vague but infinitely horrible nightmare. Mechanically he pulled the ripcord.

The 'chute opened, and then it seemed as though unseen hands were choking him. The rush of the air slackened, but a torturing jerk and then some suffocating pressure about his neck made his eyes almost start from their sockets. He forgot where he was; all he knew was that he must claw at that horrible thing that was choking him to death.

Up above him Captain Kennard, looking down at the jump, felt a great thrill of relief as he saw the white silk 'chute flutter widespread to the air. Then he saw that the symmetrical umbrella had not opened completely. Like a flash he sent his ship into a steep dive downward toward that bobbing patch of white, with Jimmy swinging twenty feet below it.

Accustomed as he was to the swiftly tragic happenings that are yet a part of life in the Air Service, the little C. O.'s heart stopped beating for a moment as he took in the significance of the distended face and wildly clawing hands of his young pilot. One of the shroud lines, running from the harness to the edges of the parachute proper, had become wound around Jimmy's neck. He was being hanged, half a mile in the air.

Without the fraction of a second's delay the captain made his decision. It was the only chance, and if, as was probable, he killed Jimmy Jennings in the attempt it would be a more merciful death than the one that was inevitable for him now. Had the 'chute opened fully Jimmy would have been dead that instant.

The captain dived a hundred feet below the struggling figure, now growing quieter and more feeble. Then he cut the motor dead. The propeller still turned lazily in the air-stream. If only there were some way to stop it! Unless his flying was accurate to the *n*th degree, that swinging propeller would tear the strangling Jimmy into pieces.

Diving slightly to keep flying speed, and circling the while, the captain watched Jimmy drop even with him. Luckily he had judged fairly closely—the feebly struggling figure dropped past him only a few feet from the fuselage, to his left. He banked steeply to the left, and with full right rudder started a sideslip.

He slipped even with Jimmy once more and then with his stick he leveled the ship, leaving full right rudder on. This skidded the ship to the left. Jimmy lighted on top of the fuselage, just behind the rear cockpit. With his belt loosed the captain forgot his ship for the moment as one of his hands caught Jimmy's foot, which was extended toward him.

He hung on grimly for a moment. If he let go of the stick for a moment to push on throttle and spark, the ship might dive suddenly and lift him out of the cockpit himself. However, it must be done—if the ship did not get up enough speed to flatten the parachute out against the tail, Jimmy's hanging would go on. As it was, the parachute was——

He looked around once more, and saw that the forward speed of the ship *had* been sufficient to wrap the big silk surface around vertical fin and tail controls. The pressure on Jimmy's throat was gone now—it must be. Gripping the stick between his knees, he clicked on both switches and pushed the throttle forward. The motor caught.

Jimmy's body was lying limply along the fuselage, and Captain Kennard's arm was almost breaking with the strain of holding to that one providentially extended leg, which he could reach by sitting sidewise in the seat. He tried to pull back on the stick a trifle—the ship was diving too fast. It did not move. With sinking heart the pilot saw that the 'chute was so entangled in the tail controls that it was impossible to move them.

Once again he gripped the stick between his knees, and his hand dropped to the wheel which controls the horizontal stabilizer on the tail of a De Haviland. By means of this wheel it is possible to raise and lower the tail surface, including the elevators, making a ship permanently nose-heavy or the reverse as long as the stabilizer is left alone after adjustment. To the captain's great relief the stabilizer worked, and gradually the ship came out of the dive, less than fifteen hundred feet high. For a

sickening moment the nose started up—that meant a stall and a tailspin which would kill some of the people below as well as the two airmen, probably.

Like a madman the captain, still gripping Jimmy's leg with one hand, whirled the wheel backward in time to bring the ship level before complete loss of flying speed.

He felt a pull on his arm—it was almost paralyzed with the strain by now. He looked around, his other hand on the stick once more.

The rush of the air, plus the easing of that frightful pressure around Jimmy's neck, had revived him. The captain watched Jimmy hack away at his parachute ropes with a knife which he had succeeded in getting out of his pocket. For endless moments the ship circled the airdrome as Jimmy worked to free himself. He had the fingers of one hand dug through the linen cover of the fuselage and clung to one of the many small ash braces. At every moment the captain was expecting a bump to send the ship into either a stall or a dive that would necessitate the frantic work with the stabilizer.

Finally Jimmy cut through the last shroud line. He was almost unconscious of where he was—totally unaware of any fear aside from the tingling consciousness that it was a tight place, but that there was hope. A vague exultation filled him, in fact, as he crawled back along the fuselage, inch by inch. He dug his fingers in to give himself a grip to fight the air pressure generated by their speed.

So completely intent was he on what he was doing that he did not even notice the camera ship only two hundred feet above him. His whole world was bound up in that flapping mass of silk that was twined around the tail controls, only a couple of feet in front of him. It did not enter his mind that a thousand feet below hundreds of people were watching that grim drama of the air with frozen horror, made bearable only through the vague, uncomprehending hope that will persist until the final die is cast.

His groping hand clutched the vertical fin, and he pulled himself to the stabilizer. As the ship, banked very slightly, droned around the airdrome he leaned against the air blast, painstakingly freeing the folds of the 'chute from the control horns, wires, and interstices, clasping the freed part of the silken bag under his arms to prevent its blowing back.

Finally it became too voluminous. The wind caught it and blew it backward. Luckily the edges were still caught in such a manner that the material blew straight back, like a huge streamer, and presented no retarding surface to the wind. In a moment he had cut loose the last of it. Only a few strands clinging to unimportant projections remained as the parachute floated earthward, flapping loosely in the light breeze.

Something in the beaming face of Captain Kennard, turned back toward him, brought Jimmy to a full realization of what he had done. For the first time he looked down at the ground from his airy perch, and was conscious of it. That packed mass of people that skirted the airdrome seemed to be in wild commotion—it looked as if they were jumping and dancing in utter abandon. Like some monster of the air a De Haviland roared down past him, and Tex MacDowell's wildly waving arm greeted him as they swooped past.

Right then it seemed as though a weight which had been crushing him for weeks was lifted. His whole being was flooded with a joyous realization of his freedom from the specter that had made his life a nightmare. Out there on his perilous perch, clinging to the frail supports that were between him and that drop to the ground—he was not afraid!

He had faced death—almost sure death—many times in the last few minutes, and now he feared it no longer.

It was the old smile that flashed back at Captain Kennard—a smile of joyous, virile recklessness that was fashioned of nothing but the wholesome delight of a strong man in a situation spiced with danger.

He inched himself farther back on the stabilizer, and his fingers found the ripcord of the other 'chute. He pulled it, and in a second was jerked free from his well-ventilated perch. The vent in the top of the 'chute gradually closed and his speed slackened until he was floating earthward slowly, literally and figuratively treading on air.

"IT'S all right, Jimmy. I can understand it, I think, and it's all over now."

Captain Kennard was speaking as he and Jimmy sat on the veranda of the operations building, watching the winking lights of

McMullen five miles away. It was a cool, star-bright night that gave promise of being really cold before morning. Jimmy had told the whole story that night, hiding nothing.

"Did you see the movie folks this afternoon?" asked Captain Kennard finally, watching the young flyer keenly.

"No—that is, except from a distance," replied Jimmy, lighting a cigaret. He felt as though he had inherited a million dollars, he told himself. Life was sure good.

"To tell the truth, I get red and prickly even thinking about meeting them after that asinine——"

"Oh, that's all right. You were a trifle too brightly illuminated. They're leaving tomorrow."

Jimmy was silent for a moment, his eyes far away. That afternoon, after he had landed, Marjorie had not even entered his thoughts, somehow. It seemed so much more important that he was a man among men again—worthy to be one of the bunch. Now, though, as he thought of her——

"Jimmy, I'm not saying this as a captain, but as a man, if you know what I mean," said Captain Kennard, tilting his rakish, individualistically dented hat farther over his eyes. "It's something I thought you might like to know, and, inasmuch as you've told me all about yourself as a result of our little soirée up there this afternoon, you won't get sore, will you?"

"Why, no, sir," answered the puzzled Jimmy.

From the recreation room next door the clink of poker chips and then the loud word "Double!" in Pop Cravath's voice came to their ears. The nightly card games had started.

"When I was leaving the other night, after that scrap—you had just gone out—Miss Mason was—er—making quite a to-do over D'Armond. You sure plastered him. From what he did when he came in, and her loving care, I figure that probably those two have a pretty good understanding. I just thought it might relieve your mind if you were feeling mean over neglecting her the last few days."

The captain hated to trade on what he had done for Jimmy that afternoon; but circumstances alter cases. He watched the set face of the younger man expectantly. He hoped with all his heart that he had not gone too far.

There was a full minute before Jimmy said anything.

"I shouldn't be surprized if you were right," he admitted finally.

He inferred many things from the captain's words—as the wily captain had intended. It hurt—but back of the hurt was ever present the glad consciousness of how newly wonderful life was. Prolonged laughter came from the building next door and MacDowell's drawling words reached his ears—

"You son-of-a-gun, don't ever scare me again that way by betting ten simoleons on a busted flush when I'm holding threes!"

Jimmy arose briskly.

"I haven't played any bridge for a month. Mind if I join in, captain?"

"Not if you let me play," grinned the captain. "I've hardly played a rubber since you have. I yearn to double, redouble and bid four no trumps."

As they walked toward the recreation room Jimmy was singing the song of the border patrol—the song that laughs at the job:

> "Ten thousand dollars, going to the folks,
> Ten thousand dollars, going to the folks,
> Engine goes blooey—another flyer croaks,
> Ten thousand dollars, going to the folks!"

The captain joined it in the cracked, tuneless voice that passed for singing as far as he was concerned. His thoughts, however, were not very deeply concerned with the song. As mentioned at the start of the story of Jimmy Jennings, handling an Air Service outfit is sometimes an unconventional job. The captain trusted his instinct considerably about matters of that kind, but so far as the facts in his possession went he had lied unblushingly—or at least exaggerated to a degree that approached deceit—about Miss Marjorie Mason.

And he did not regret it, either, as he sang with Jimmy.

# "A BIT OF A SPHIT"

by E·O·FOSTER

*Author of "The Coconut Grenadiers," "Scrambled Ducklings," etc.*

Oh, it's home, boys, home,
Home we want to be;
Home, boys, home
In the land of Liberty;
For we've run up the flag
And nailed it to the pole;
And we'll all reenlist—
Like —— we will!
—*Song of the G. O. 40 men.*

"MAJOR MORPHY will please take the stand."

The prosecution in the case of Corporal Morey, Company E, Second Battalion, —teenth U. S. Infantry, had finished its examination of witnesses. The ante-room off the judge advocate's office in the headquarters building at Manila was crowded, for when it was rumored around that "Old Spud"—as the witness just called was known throughout the American forces—had come post-haste from Bacoor to take the stand in behalf of a non-commissioned officer in his old company, every one who, by hook or crook, could edge past the sentry at the door was on hand to see the fireworks.

There was a scuffling of feet, a whispered "Gangway!" and the major moved through the crowd to stand at attention in front of the president of the court, Colonel Wadleigh, Second —— Volunteers, ready to take oath. This formality finished, the old veteran seated himself and nodded toward Lieutenant Jansen, who was defending the accused soldier.

"Will you please tell the court your name and rank?"

"Jawn T. Morphy, major, U. S. A., commandin' the Siccond Battalion, —teenth Infantry."

"Will you please tell the court where you were on the twenty-seventh day of June, this year, and what, if anything, took place out of the ordinary on that day."

Lieutenant Jansen had been a crack lawyer before he joined the Army at the outbreak of the Spanish-American War, and had here a case just to his liking.

"I was at Bacoor, in the Departmint o' Southern Luzon wid me battalion. We had jist finished the advance from San Pedro Macati by way o' Zapote Bridge and were encamped on the south side o' the small strame which passes through thot village, imptyin' into Manila Bay a short distance below. Me min was bathin' in the wather, washin' the dirt out o' their uniforms, gittin' shaved up a bit, or polishin' their ar-rms and accoutramints. 'Twas a quiet, paceful scane, and iv'ry wan was hap——"

"Never mind the description of the scenery, major; what we want to hear is just what happened that day."

Colonel Wadleigh, thinking he had a chance to pay off an old score or two on the Regular Army in general and on the major in particular, was beginning to heckle the old veteran.

"You may tell your story in your own way, major, making it as brief as consistent with the facts, if you please."

Lieutenant Jansen knew the procedure of courts martial, which is somewhat

different from that of civil courts, and did not intend to have his witness interfered with.

"Will, as I was about to say whin I was interrupthed in sich an unceremonious manner by yersilf— Oh, 'twas not ye, 'twas the prisidint—thank ye for the correction! Now, as I was about to say, me min were all happy and continted, some o' them singin' away as if there was no insurgents or sthaff officers within a hundred miles, whin along comes a major from hidquarters aridin' a most be-utiful harse— What was his name did ye say, Mr. Prisidint?

"Will, he never tauld me his name, but I heard an enlisthed man in the corridor jist now call him 'Inspictir-Giniril Blankety-Blank' (on the sly, ye know, jist a whisper thot I could take no notice of) and from the way this same major cursed in me prisince on thot same twinty-sivinth day o' June, I'll sign a voucher thot if 'Blankety-Blank' is not his— Yis sor, yis sor, I'll cut out the frills, for 'tis outradgis the way ordher is maintained in this court-room. Thot's him sittin' over there by the judge-advocate.

"Yis, 'twas all quiet and contintmint, but whin this major was halted by the gyard at the bridge, he began to 'blankety-blank-the-blankety-blank-son-of-a-biscuit-shooter' thot had the nerve to sthop an inspictir-giniril. Whot did the sintry do, did ye say, Mr. Prisidint?

"He jist made thot inspictir-giniril git down off his harse—and thin offered to ferry him across the river in a boat, as was me ordhers, the approaches to the bridge havin' been mined earlier in the day. The inspictir-giniril would have none of it, and pushin' the sintry aside jumps down the low bank and gits into a native canoe.

"Thin he ordhers the carporal o' the gyard to push his harse in afther him, which he did.

"Thin —— broke loose, for the poor baste upsit the canoe and dumped the native and the inspictir-giniril into the river. And thin, havin' finished his errand at thot particular spot, the noble animal swam ashore, lavin' the inspictir-giniril ahangin' on one end o' the canoe spoutin' wather and curses like the —— gittin' a baptism, and the native hangin' on the other end spoutin' wather and prayers like a monk in a fish-pond."

THERE was a roar of laughter from everybody, only the accused soldier and the inspector-general keeping straight faces. Colonel Wadleigh hunted for an imaginary paper under his desk as he swung his gavel for order.

"Yes, major, and then what happened?"

"Thin Carporal Morey, who was in charge o' the gyard, made a dive from the bank and swam to the canoe. Whin he raiched it, he began pushin' it toward a bit of sphit which——"

"Whot do yez mane by 'sphit,' major?" Colonel Wadleigh, in attempting to mimic the witness, had overstepped all bounds of military courtesy. Major Morphy drew himself up at the affront; and for a moment it looked as if he would spring at the colonel, who had let a faint flicker of amusement play over his features at the chuckle of laughter from the rear of the room.

"Whot do I mane by 'sphit'? Will, may it plaise the gintlemin o' the court—and yersilf, Mr. Prisidint—the wor-rud 'sphit,' spilt 'ess,' 'pay,' 'eye,' 'tay,' has siv'ral and various uses which I will thry to explain to yez.

"First the verb 'sphit' wid the preposition 'to,' m'anin' to ejict saliva from the mouth."

The major looked at the inspector-general, who shifted uneasily in his seat. Then he glanced toward the judge advocate, who always made lisping noises in pronouncing certain words, and continued:

"Siccond, another verb, which manes to make a noise like sphittin' when ye talk—a most impolite mannerism unliss ye can't hilp it. Third, another verb, m'anin' to come down scattherin' like rain shaken from the back o' thot auld buzzard— Don't fash yersilf, Mr. Prisidint, I was not lookin' at ye, but at thot bird o' carrion circlin' in the air jist over the church yondther."

"That will do, major; we know what 'spit' is."

Colonel Wadleigh was trying to get back the prestige he had lost a moment before.

"Ye do not know the m'anin' o' the word, but ye will soon. And as I was about to explain, the fourth use o' the word 'sphit' is a noun, m'anin' a pointed rod, somewhot like me sword here, on which mate is turned for roastin'. Fifth, a verb again, m'anin' to transfix wid a sphit. Sixth, a noun m'anin' the spawn o' various insects, like doodle-bugs wid gold spots on their shoulders."

Here the major's eyes bored into the crowd of majors of the staff at the back of the room, wiping the grins from their faces as if by magic. Then he continued: "Sixth, a verb, m'anin' to sthring on a bit of a sthick like ye've been thryin' to sthring me. And sivinth, a noun, m'anin' a p'int o' low land or a long narrow shoal ixtindin' from a shore into the wather.

"Now, just to be sure ye have it all right I'll drop me bit o' brogue and spell it for you as an operator does at Cintril. 'S' for 'spite,' 'p' for 'perfidy,' 'i' for 'insollence' and 't' for 'trouble.' You can take your choice as to what I meant when I said 'sphit.' If you are looking for more information you can find it in Webster's, but you are looking for trouble with Major John T. Morphy, you'll not have to go that far."

The major stood glaring at Colonel Wadleigh. He was hurt to the core. His gray eyes narrowed and narrowed until they were mere slits. The red tide of anger crept up his cheeks until it was licking at the fringe of hair grown white in the service of his adopted country. Suddenly he pointed his finger at the colonel and said—

"I'm awaiting your apology, sir."

And the colonel gave it.

The tomb-like silence of the room was broken by the voice of Lieutenant Jansen—

"Yes, major, we all know what a 'spit' is now; will you please continue."

"Will, the carporal was pushin' as hard as he could (Ye'll pardon me brogue, gintlemin; I was born wid it and it comes aisier-like in sph'akin') and the inspictirginiril was swearin' as loud as he could, indin' up by callin' the carporal a name no gintlemin would use toward any wan, much liss toward an enlisted mon thot could not knock him down without bein' liable to the dith pinilty in time o' war."

"What did you do then, major?"

"I ordhered the carporal ashore and wint to me dinner."

"And then what happened?"

"I did not see anything happen jist thin, but in about tin minutes the inspictirginiril came limpin' up to me quarthers, minus one o' his boots, minus his bilt and side ar-rms, a-drippin' wather and curses at aich sthep."

"Tell the court what he said, please."

"Will, he began wid, 'By ——, sor, is this the way you receive an inspictirginiril? And indid wid, 'No wonder they call you "Old Spud," you —— auld Irish sirgint; you sthink like a rotten potato, and yer half-baked ragamuffins are worse than——"

The major looked around as if surprized at the laughter in the court. Colonel Wadleigh rapped for order. The inspector-general stirred uneasily in his seat, for the major had turned and was looking straight at him.

"Yes, major; and what, if anything did he say after 'than?'

"Div-vil a wor-rud."

"What did he do, major?"

"He made a lick at me auld hid wid his huntin'-crop—and slid in a hape on the flure."

The court-room suddenly was so quiet that the big eight-day clock on the wall could be heard— "lick, crop"—"lick, crop"—"lick, crop"—"lick, crop," as if it were ready to back up the old Irishman's words.

"Why did he slide to the floor, major?"

"I had him by the gullet, chokin' his ugly wor-ruds down his lyin' throat. 'Twas not thot I moinded whot he sid about mesilf, and he did not harm me much wid his sthick, but no mon, be he inspictirginiril or jist plain civilian, can call the min o' my battalion names and get away wid it. They're the bist min, come one, come all, in the Ahr-rmy! Ragamuffins and half baked spuds indade!"

The old boy's breath was coming in gasps. His face was red. His glance would have killed the inspector-general had glances the power to slay. He himself might hector and ——, and even double —— the Second Battalion, but no one else could, and he didn't care who knew it.

"Yes, major; and then what happened?"

Lieutenant Jansen's voice was cool and quiet. The major passed from his rage to a suspicious calm in a minute.

"He fainted jist as he did thot day when he deliberately sphit in the face o' Carporal Morey."

"That's all."

Lieutenant Jansen had finished with his witness.

"Wait a minute, major."

The judge advocate thought he had a chance. He asked the stenographer to read the inspector-general's testimony on this point. In the usual monotone of court-room scribes the clerk began:

"*Question:* 'Did you ever see the prisoner before the day he pushed your horse into the river?'

"*Answer:* 'Yes, sir, at Zapote Bridge on May 25, when I was inspecting the troops on the south line preparatory to their advance against the insurgents of Paranaque. In the course of my inspection I visited one of the Cossack posts thrown out toward the river. The prisoner was lying at his proper distance from his men, and I could see the man acting as "point" keeping close watch toward the front.

" 'I spoke to the corporal, and as I spoke, something caught in my throat and I was unfortunate enough to eject a small amount of mucus, which struck the corporal in the face as he looked up at me. He glared at me, started to rise, and then, remembering who I was, slunk down again and refused to answer my questions. There was a shot from the near-by insurgent lines which came uncomfortably close, and seeing that I was drawing the fire of an enemy sniper, I started to return to brigade headquarters.' "

"Now, major, having had your memory refreshed by this transcript, are you still willing to swear that the inspector-general acted toward the soldier as you have stated he did, and if so, how do you know it?"

"Yis, sor. I was insphictin' the outposts mesilf thot day, wid the battalion adjutant. We were hidden liss than five paces from the carporal whin the inspictir-giniril come up behind him. The carporal looked up at him over his shoulder whin the officer spoke, but did not attempt to rise or salute, as it is aginst ordhers to pay any official courtesies while on Cossack post. The carporal began to answer the question, but before the worruds were out o' his mouth the inspictir-giniril cursed him outradgis for not sthandin' to attention and deliberately sphit in his face.

"Both the adjutant and mesilf were dumfounded, but whin we heard the zip o' the bullit and saw the officer fall, we waited a bit to see whot the carporal would do afther sich an insult."

"Well, major, what did he do?"

"Whot any ither mon in me battalion would do—picked the officer up and carried him out o' the line o' foire. Jist thin we got the ordher to advance, and I nivir saw the inspictir-giniril ag'in till thot day he came ridin' up to the bridge at Bacoor."

"That's all."

The judge advocate had had enough; but Lieutenant Jansen requested that the inspector-general again be put on the stand.

"Major, can you swear, will you swear, that the prisoner here is the man upon whom you were—ahem—so unfortunate as to expectorate on that most—ahem—unfortunate day, when you were unfortunate enough—ahem—to faint?"

"It's the man."

The inspector-general's voice broke as he answered. He knew his days in Uncle Sam's uniform were numbered. No pull could save his commission after this testimony.

"I now ask the court's permission to call the adjutant-general of the Philippines."

Lieutenant Jansen knew that he had won his case, but lawyer-like could not resist the temptation to show up the opposing counsel; and there is no rule against "surprizes" in the military code. The court stood to "attention" as Adjutant-General Garry came into the room, taking his seat when he had been sworn and was ready to testify.

"General," the lieutenant began, "have you ever seen the prisoner before, and if so when and where?"

"The prisoner, Corporal Ray Morey, reported at my office on the morning of June twenty-seventh with special messages from the commanding officer of the forces to the south of Manila. He was here until the next morning when he was ordered back to his post at Bacoor.

"When the charges in this case passed through my office, I attempted to call the attention of the inspector-general to this discrepancy, but he said he was certain of his man. As a matter of fact, it was Corporal Peter Morey, the prisoner's twin brother, who pushed the horse into the river. I hope there will be no miscarriage of justice, gentlemen."

"That is all, general. Any questions, Mr. Judge Advocate?"

"That's all. Request a recess," came from the astonished prosecutor.

"Recess granted."

Colonel Wadleigh also needed a few minutes to collect his scattered wits.

THE major was jubilant. His smile took in the whole court-room, excepting only the inspector-general. He slapped Lieutenant Jansen on the shoulder and his "turned their flank thot toime"

could be heard in the censor's office across the hall.

"The commanding general's compliments, and he would like to see the major a moment."

Old Spud looked up in astonishment at the orderly who was voicing General Otis' orders. His moment of triumph was eclipsed by a new anxiety. With a muttered "Whot the ——!" he hurried through the long corridor leading into the office of the head of the American forces in the Philippines. He saluted and stood at attention, prepared for the worst.

"Major," the general began, "I received orders day before yesterday to prepare a brigade for immediate service in China. I had intended to name two battalions of your regiment as part of this force. When I spoke of the matter to the adjutant-general he handed me the report of the inspector-general who visited your camp. Let me read you a paragraph or two from it:

"I found this battalion, over sixty per cent. of which is made up of General Order 40 men, strung out in a most unmilitary manner along the banks of a small river at Bacoor. They were dirty, half-clad, insolent and recalcitrant. After my most unfortunate accident, while I was still trying to make my way to shore, they began to sing a most ribald song about not reenlisting. It is my opinion that these so-called volunteer regulars should be discharged at once; that the other men of the battalion, and their company officers, should be severly disciplined; and that their commanding officer, evidently an old hang-over from the Civil War, should be ordered before a board for retirement."

"He's a lyin'——"

The major put a stopper on his tongue just in time.

"That may or may not be so, major, but what I called you in here for, and what I want to know is, will enough of your volunteer-regulars reenlist so that your battalion can go forward with seasoned men, and not recruits, in its ranks?"

The question was a stunner. The major knew how tired his men were of useless hiking after an enemy that could never be made to stand. The inspector-general had been right in saying that more than sixty per cent. of the battalion were men enlisted for the Spanish-American War only.

And what was worse, he knew that the order from Washington taking the travel pay away from these men who had, in the most part, been cajoled into leaving their volunteer regiments by the promise of a day's pay and a day's ration money for every twenty miles between place of first enlistment and point of discharge, was the reason for the discontent existing, not only in his battalion, but in the regular regiments throughout the islands.

The men felt that the Government had not only held them for nearly a year without cause, but that now, in order to force them to reenlist, had ruled them out of three hundred dollars and intended to herd them again like sheep on the old transports for their homeward journey.

"Giniril, I don't know. If they were here I could soon tell ye. Wid your permission, sor, I'll ride down to Bacoor tonight and find out."

"You need not take the trouble, major. That question may settle itself sooner than you expect. That's all."

The general watched the major through the door, and then turned again to the report condemning the Second Battalion.

A few minutes later, just as court reconvened, a reporter from the Manila *Times* came rushing into headquarters with a news flimsy. It told of the women and children in the besieged legations in Peking and said that the Great Powers were already rushing men to China.

The judge advocate looked at the president. The president looked at the inspector-general. Old Spud looked at the buzzard circling higher and higher over the old church. There was going to be a —— of a shindy in China, and he evidently was not to be in on it.

He could not understand the attitude of General Otis. Why all this tomfoolery over a ducking in the river while white women and children were held as if caged by the yellow horde hurling itself against the walls of Peking? He hardly heard the judge advocate's voice as he dismissed the case; but he did hear, a moment later, the rhythm of many feet stepping snappily to the lilt of "Garry Owen," the favorite march of General Custer's old Seventh and of the —teenth as well.

He could hardly believe his ears. Had the general played a joke on him and ordered the battalion in? Already the windows were crowded. Old Spud could hear the voice of his adjutant as he halted the men in battalion front. He started to join the crowd peering down on his "ragamuffins," then he turned and slid through the door

and down the stairs, not even noticing that he had slipped in front of General Otis in the corridor.

"Prese-n-t, arms!"

It was no ragged battalion that brought its Krags to salute with the precision of automatons. From cross-rifles on campaign hats to laces on leggings the "Sic-cond" was as well groomed as a cavalry officer on his wedding day.

The major took his place exactly facing the senior captain temporarily in command of the battalion, and returned the salute. To his astonishment that officer continued to keep the point of his saber down, the men with their rifles at "present" holding steady as rocks.

"Whot the ——"

"Never mind, major, it's all right. Let me take them a minute and I'll tell you whether the inspector-general was right or wrong when he condemned your battalion."

General Otis had followed so closely on Old Spud's heels that the battalion commander had meant, and was holding, the salute for him!

For five minutes General Otis put the Second through the Manual of Arms, barking his commands at them as he had at the cadets at the Point many years before; but he could not catch them napping; and all the time Old Spud stood by suffering the torments of the damned, promising himself what he would do and what he wouldn't do if things went wrong. But things didn't go wrong this time; for the general gave the command "At ease!" and stood ready to apply the acid test which would show either the true gold of the battalion or a baser metal hidden underneath.

"My men," he began, "the Boxers are hammering at the doors of the Legations at Peking. There are twoscore white women in danger there. The troops of other nations are already on the way. I have received orders to send a picked brigade to China on the first available transport. I had picked this battalion for one, but there are many of you who have the right to discharge.

"Now I'm going to give any man that is entitled to it, his discharge at once. If he desires it I'll send him home as best I can. If he reenlists I'll do my best to get his discharge by favor as soon as this trouble is over. You know the condition that confronts us."

Suddenly his voice rang out like a clarion.

"Who's going to Peking?"

There was a wild cheer from the "Sic-cond"—every man Jack lifting his rifle above his head. Then to the tune of "Home, Boys, Home," old Sergeant Ragan began improvising, the battalion following his clear Irish tenor:

"Let's go, boys, go
To fight the bold Chinee;
Let's go, boys, go
Across the Yellow Sea.
For we've run up the flag
In Manila (—— our souls)
And we'll chase those blooming Chinks
Into their —— —— holes."

The general stood two verses of it and then betook himself to his office, where from his window he watched the proud Old Spud march his men to the Quartel Malate to prepare for their next jaunt under the Stars and Stripes.

TWO days later a big, white-sided transport slipped down the bay. Its decks were lined with "the bist min of the bist battalion of the bist rigimint of the U. S. Ar-rmy," and Old Spud, comfortably perched on the bridge, was chuckling with glee as he heard his men chanting, "Let's go, boys, go," for the benefit of another smaller transport outbound for San Francisco, loaded with military prisoners and other undesirables.

He caught a glimpse of Major "Blankety-Blank" standing alone on her cabin deck. He turned his back with a muttered imprecation. Then a smile chased the gloom from his face, and the captain of the transport, standing near by, bent close enough to catch, above the sweep of the freshening gale, his—

"They'll be the dith o' me yit, the whole —— b'ilin' o' thim."

# THE CLEAR FLAME of COURAGE

by PAUL L. ANDERSON

*Author of "The Tyrant Saurian."*

THERE are many kinds of courage. There is the courage of the bulldog, who is brave because he knows no better; there is the courage of Henry of Navarre, who, when attention was called to his shaking knees, responded—

"They would shake worse than that did they but know where I shall take them this day!"

There is day courage and night courage, courage of battle and courage of sickness; and there is the courage of the one who, alone, unseen of men, without applause, endures beyond endurance for the sake of those he loves.

Dick Ansley was getting out telephone poles on the northern slope of Lockport Mountain. He had taken out about a hundred and fifty since the middle of October, and now, two months after starting the job, was getting out what he thought would be his last load, since it was a dull and overcast day, with a promise of snow in the air.

Even a slight amount of snow would stop his work, for the road was difficult at best, and a covering of three or four inches, masking the hummocks and hollows, would make the footing too dangerous to risk his horses.

The mountain, on the side toward Lockport Valley, is steep and rocky; the track over which the poles must travel is hardly more than a trail, and it is hard enough at any time to get the poles down.

So Dick had felled and trimmed three tall chestnut-trees, had chained them on his wagon—which was merely a pair of wheels with axle and pole—so that the small ends of the trees dragged behind on the ground, and was now on his way home, walking beside his stout team as they hauled the load over the bumpy track.

Dick figured that he ought to get at least fifteen dollars apiece for these poles, for they were long and straight and sound—he had taken care to choose the best—and when barked and delivered at the railroad the price would make up an even fifteen hundred dollars since he had started the work. The telephone company paid from six to fifteen dollars a pole, depending on the length and quality, and Dick had averaged around ten dollars on the ones he had got out.

Ansley had worked for the past fifteen years as a farm-hand, and now, at thirty, was starting out for himself. He had lived frugally; had saved enough for the first payment on a farm in Lockport Valley, giving a mortgage for the remainder of the purchase price; and he counted on this pole job to clear the mortgage and leave him something over, for the farm included two parcels of timber, mostly chestnut, one on Lockport Mountain, the other across the valley, on Schoolhouse Hill.

He did not mean to do ordinary farming; he could realize, as most of his neighbors could not, that the climate in the valley, with its short Summers and severe Winters, was not adapted to corn and wheat and

oats, but that it was admirably fitted for apples and small fruits such as blackberries, raspberries and strawberries. He therefore planned to stock his place with trees and bushes and to work up a market in the neighboring cities, carrying his produce there in a one-ton truck, and thus avoid railroad charges and middlemen's profits, at the same time getting the highest prices for choice fruit.

His wife encouraged him to this, for she—a former school-teacher and well educated—possessed considerable foresight; nor was Dick himself lacking in business acumen. He figured that this pole job would clear the place and get him the truck he needed, as well as helping him to stock his fruit-farm, and that by working out as farm-hand during the first Summer or two he could get by in good shape. In three or four years he ought to be making at least three thousand a year—maybe more—and out of that they could save enough to send Dick, junior, to college; for Ansley, wholly self-educated, had a full appreciation of the worth of a college course, and meant to give his boy advantages which he himself had not had.

He had, to be sure, studied hard by himself, especially along the lines of fruit-raising, but he wanted the youngster to do more than that; wanted him to have a "real education." And the boy, now ten years old, had been inspired with the same ambition, so that he earned money, from time to time, by doing light chores for the neighbors.

Yes, on the whole, Dick Ansley had good reason to feel cheerful as he drove his team down the mountain, with forty-five dollars' worth of good poles dragging behind. He had worked hard—it was no small task to fell and trim and bark and team a hundred and fifty poles—but it had paid well, and his plans were going nicely thus far. If they continued as he hoped, he would be in good shape by the time he was fifty—not rich by any means, but comfortably fixed.

He had chosen to take his last load of poles from Lockport Mountain rather than from the other wood-lot, because the former had the finer trees. The road was much more difficult, and the work of felling and loading was harder, for the mountain was more rugged, but he wanted to make his last job the best; he might even get more than forty-five dollars for these poles, for each of them was over sixty feet.

If there should be eight or ten dollars extra he would take his wife and the boy to Lockport for a little celebration; ice-cream, the movies, perhaps even a light rifle for Dick, junior, who was getting old enough to use a .22 on rabbit and woodchuck. Thinking thus, Ansley guided his team down the steep slope, avoiding as well as he might the hummocks and rocks and thank-you-marms, when with the swift unexpectedness of lightning disaster struck, frightful, appalling, incredible.

LOCKPORT MOUNTAIN, where Dick was, is some three and a half or four miles from the State road, and five from Dick's home. He was following a half-overgrown wood road that wound and twisted up the steep slope, zigzagging from ledge to ledge, tortuous, uneven, dangerous, a road that he never used without a qualm of unease—not fear exactly, but a thought of what might happen.

It was the same road as that on which, twelve years before, Hiram Miller had been killed, when his team ran away and he was thrown over a cliff; and Mary Ansley never saw her husband start out for that section of woods without a feeling of dread lest the same thing befall him. Miller's daughter had been Mary's chum, so the tragedy had come close home to Mrs. Ansley. But Dick always laughed at her fears, took special care when using that road, and had never met with any slightest mishap.

Now, when he was about a third of the way down the mountain, the wheels bumped over a rock and dropped perhaps two feet; and as the rear of the load followed, the chain which bound the poles together at the end snapped and the trees were flung wide, though the other chain, which held them to the axle, did not give.

One of the poles struck Dick just below the left hip, knocking him into the brush, and the frightened horses ran away, dashing wildly down the mountain, the logs bounding and leaping after them, crashing against trees and rocks as the frantic team strove to outrun the terror that pursued. Dick, however, heard nothing of this beyond the first few seconds; struggling to rise from where he had been hurled, he felt an agonizing thrust of pain, everything turned black before him, and he fell unconscious.

It was some time before he recovered his senses, and by then the woods were silent

save for the ordinary noises—the sighing of the faint breeze overhead, the rubbing of branches, the faint scratching and scrambling of such little animals as might be abroad. Dick found himself lying on his left side in a small thicket, and made an effort to get up, but such a fearful pain assailed him that he dropped back, groaning.

The pain was chiefly in his hip, and he instinctively put his hand there, finding the joint swollen beyond belief, distorted. He lay still, groaning from time to time; and slowly, gradually, the consciousness of what had happened forced itself on his mind; his hip was dislocated. He knew what that meant; he could not walk, could not even creep, but must lie still waiting for help, waiting until his team, going home without him, should let his wife know that something was wrong; till she could get the neighbors out and set them to searching.

As this thought came to him his heart sank, for he remembered that he had told Mary he was going up on Schoolhouse Hill; they would search there first, and it might easily be forty-eight hours before they would find him on the mountain. That, he knew, would mean death; his sweater had been on the logs, and he had on only a suit of overalls over his underclothes; cold and pain, nervous exhaustion, would make an end of him before help came. Oh, God, if only he hadn't changed his mind after starting out! If only he had gone to Schoolhouse Hill!

By now the agony was worse—unbearable, it seemed; and Dick rolled his head from side to side as he groaned and shuddered with the torture. Panic began to flood up within him—to die in the brush, like a wounded beast! Something cold fell on his hand, and he looked down to see several flakes of snow on the sleeve of his jumper.

That was too much; they would not even find his body; and Dick rolled over, caught hold of a sapling, and with infinite, slow effort dragged himself upright, tried to stand. A wave of hot pain flashed through him and he fell; the fall wrenched his hip, sent a sharp stab of agony through his lower leg, and again he lost consciousness.

When he came to himself again the woods were dark. A white covering of snow lay three or four inches thick on the ground, bushes and small undergrowth breaking its surface. Above, the sky was clear, the stars glistening through the openings between the branches, and Dick saw plainly the line of three that formed the belt of Orion. By their position he knew that it must be about nine o'clock, and as he thought this he realized that he was chilly; the weather had changed with the snow, had grown much colder.

This, Dick knew, sealed his fate beyond all question, and he gave up all faintest hope; he would pass before morning. That settled and decided, he relaxed, lay still, waiting for the sleep which would be the forerunner of death, for the easing of his awful pain, the coma from which he would never waken.

Gradually the sleep came on, gradually the pain grew less; his eyes closed, and he was no longer cold—the end was coming. He gave himself up to thought, and was mildly surprized to find that his thoughts were pleasant, cheerful; he had supposed that they would be disagreeable, even painful; but vaguely, as if from some past existence, he recalled what a doctor had once told him—that Nature often administers an anodyne to the dying, that they may cease to suffer. Yes, he remembered that day; Mary had been with him in the doctor's office—and with the thought his eyes snapped open.

Mary! What of her if he died? She could not manage the farm alone, but would have to go back to teaching.

And what of Dick, junior? Mary could never earn enough to send him to college; he would have to go to work as his father had done, to struggle all his life for a mere living, instead of taking an engineering course and getting along in the world.

By Heaven, no! That should not happen. He must live, to take care of the youngster!

With that Dick began to fight, to struggle with all his force against the lethargy that dragged him down, that weighted his limbs, his eyes, his very soul. Struggling, striving, he kept his eyes open, pulled himself back to consciousness; and as he did so he was aware again of the pain in his leg. It was good; it helped him in his fight; aching, grinding, shooting, it brought him back till at length he was fully awake, fully alive once more, alive—to suffer.

And then as he lay there he debated what to do. He could not live the night

out where he was, that he knew well; the cold would sweep down on him again before long, and he would grow weaker and weaker, less and less able to resist, till in the end the enemy would have its way with him. No, he must be doing something; he must get home.

But how? He could not make the journey, five long miles, with a dislocated hip As he thought this a stab of pain in his lower leg suggested that it was broken as well.

Raising his head slightly, he glanced down, to see that between the knee and the ankle the leg lay at an unnatural angle—yes, it was broken, and as Dick realized this he dropped back with a groan. Heavens, wasn't the one thing bad enough, without the other? Well, he must do something, and that quickly; so, gathering himself together, he set about helping himself as best he might.

The first thing to do was to reduce the dislocation; but he knew he could accomplish this only by keeping steadily to the front of his mind the thought of his boy, working all his life, as he himself had done, for a bare living; this was the only thing that could give him strength to endure the deadly agony that lay before him. He fixed his mind on this thought, and set to work.

Dick was accustomed to keep his overalls in place with a heavy leather belt, and this he unstrapped from around his waist. With it in his hand he caught hold of the birch sapling he had used before, and slowly, an inch at a time, sat up. No man can know the suffering this cost him; it seemed as if his body were being torn in pieces, and he no longer groaned.

The torment was too fierce, too savage for that, and the only sound he made came through clenched teeth, through lips drawn back in a set and rigid grin; a faint quavering sound it was, half moan, half whimper, coming from the back of his throat, for his muscles were set too hard to let his lungs force out a groan through the white lips. His head was thrown back nearly to his shoulders, and when he had gained a sitting position he rested for a time, braced against the sapling, panting, before he made the next move.

Then, leaning forward, he looped the belt around his left leg slightly above the knee, drew it taut, and inched about until he could pass it around the sapling. It was not long enough to tie, so he got out his pocket-knife, cut off the left sleeve of his jumper, and with that fastened the belt firmly to the tree. He then lay down once more—always with that strange little whimpering moan—and gathered strength for the next step.

Above him the bare branches rustled, and beyond them—far, far beyond—the stars gleamed against the dark blue of the sky. Save for this rustling of the branches and the dry leaves still clinging to the oaks, the woods were still; no other sound came to his ears as he lay on his back, trying to summon his courage.

Looking up, he could see the boughs interlaced in fantastic patterns against the blue background, and he wondered if he would ever again see them in leaf. Vague thoughts came to him, memories chiefly of Summer, of his work in the fields, of the sweet scent of fresh-cut hay, of the dust of the mow; the outline of a white birch showed in the dark forest, and he thought with satisfaction that he had got in enough firewood for the Winter.

But now he was growing chilly once more; while moving, the pain had kept him warm, but the cold of the snow was striking through his thin clothing, and he knew he must not lie still any longer.

Turning on his left side, Dick reached out to grasp another small birch that grew near, and pulled himself toward it. As the slack of the belt was taken up and the strain came on his tortured leg, Dick dropped back, shuddering; he lacked the strength, the sheer, cold nerve, to put any further pull on those torn ligaments, those agonized muscles; he could not, he could not! It was more than a human being might endure; he could not do it!

Relaxed, Dick lay still, whimpering. His eye was caught by a small opening in the brush, and looking through this he found he could see out over the valley, for he was near the margin of a rocky ledge, and the tops of the nearest trees in that direction were well below him. By now the moon had risen, flooding the valley with its calm, clear light, silvering the pure snow that covered hill and hollow, casting heavy black shadows from tree and bush.

Dick's glance was arrested by the yellow spark of a light in some farmhouse window, and he wondered whose house it was.

Then, looking more carefully, he made out the dark forms of two tall tamaracks which grew on either side of the doorway, their tops showing black against the snow-covered fields beyond, and he knew it was his own home. His own!

As well as if he were there he could see the inside of that house, knew what was going on. Mary had put the youngster to bed, reassuring him by telling him what she did not herself believe, that daddy was just working late and would be back by and by.

That done, she had let the neighbors know that her husband was not home; and, having set them to searching, she had settled herself to wait before the open fire in the big living-room; to wait, sick with fear, to worry!

And Dick's heart sank as he remembered that Mary thought him on Schoolhouse Hill. If only he hadn't changed his mind! His home! Would he ever again see that living-room, with its great fireplace? Would he ever again hold his wife in his arms, ever again see the boy come running to meet him? And for the first time in twenty years Dick prayed.

"For Mary—and the youngster— O God, help me!"

As if in answer to his prayer there came to his mind the words of a poem he had once read—

> —whose spirit burns
> With such clear flame of courage to the skies——

No, "spirit" wasn't the word. What was it? No matter. What counted was courage—that was it—courage—God meant him to help himself—courage! Outstretched on the snow, Dick reached up above his head, clasped his hands about the sapling, pulled till once again he felt the drag on his leg. From his dry throat came the whisper—

"For Mary—and the boy—courage— O God!"

Digging his left heel into the ground, he pushed and pulled at the same time. Again that whimpering moan forced its way from his throat as the torture grew more and more acute. Hot floods of agony swept in waves through muscle and nerve—despite the cold, sweat stood on his face. He forced his mind to think not of the pain but of his arms, tightening, ever tightening. . . . . Oh, God! Oh, God! . . . Courage—that was it—courage—Mary—the boy——

There came a sharp, sudden snap as the joint went back, and Dick dropped limp, utterly relaxed, sick, shaking. Trembling from head to foot, he lay for a while, till the cold air pierced his light overalls, chilled the sweat on his body, roused him.

Moving a little, he found that the agony in his hip was less; still more severe than any pain he had ever known, it was not so awful as at first; he could move without that horrible moan. A hissing gasp of indrawn breath followed his efforts, but that was better than the other—not so ghastly—more human.

And now his thoughts turned to the broken leg. Would it be possible for him to creep home with that as it was? Better not; the bones would likely pierce the skin, and from that gangrene might follow; he would patch it up somehow, to last till a doctor could set it.

Moving about, Dick gathered branches from the bushes, heaped up a pile of them. Working himself to a sitting position by the aid of the sapling, he arranged the branches as best he could about the leg, binding them in place with the belt which he took from his knee and with the sleeve of his jumper, cut into strips.

He made no definite attempt to set the bones, but merely bound them so that they would not move about, and, this done, summoned his strength for the long journey home. He was by no means sure he could make it.

Both his hip and his leg pained frightfully, but he could at least get part way down to the main road, and so stand a better chance of being found by the searchers. He looked around for a last sight of the house, picked it out, murmured——

> "With such clear flame of courage——"

and set out on his dreadful journey.

He never knew how he made it. Always after, those five long miles were to him a blurred memory of age-long tortures, of scrambling over rocks and frozen ground, of slipping and sliding on ice, where springs flowed over the road, congealed in slants of merciless cold. Part of the way he went on hands and one knee, his injured leg dragging useless behind; after endless years of this his palms were cut and torn, raw and bleeding.

Thereafter he crept like a wounded beast, his form inert from the waist down, resting

on his forearms, hauling himself slowly, painfully along. By and by he grew in some sort delirious, or so it seemed, for he thought the trees beside the track were bending over and laughing at him as he passed, mocking at his efforts, jeering his suffering; strange unearthly faces peered at him from the forest, and uncouth, bestial voices derided him, assured him he could never make it, that he might as well give over the attempt, lie down and die in comfort.

He thought of the ease, the relief he had felt before, yearned for it, for peace, even at the cost of life itself. Vaguely he knew that this could not be, that he must go on, that he was imagining the voices, the laughter; and yet for the time they seemed real, as real as the pain in his hip, as the patches of moonlight that lay athwart his path; no, he must not give up, he must not!

Grinding his teeth, shaking his drooping head from side to side, he went on; sick, trembling, tortured by that hideous flaming pain, he still pressed on, dragged himself inch by fearful inch over the frozen ground. His clothes were sodden with water from the melted snow, and from this he gained an idea; his throat was parched and dry, and he scooped up snow, letting it melt in his mouth, swallowing it in choking gulps.

He was too weak to spare the strength for lifting it in his hands, so he dropped his head and gathered it in his mouth. It eased the thirst, gave him some measure of relief, helped rouse his vital forces, now ebbing low. Several times he fell, rolled from some rock to a lower level, screaming aloud with the torture; later, he found his sweater, put it on, thankful for the protection it gave his bleeding arms, the warmth it gave his body. At intervals he whispered to himself the magic words—

"With such clear flame of courage——"

He repeated them over and over, drawing strength from them, bracing himself to endure, to go on.

"Mary!" he whispered also, and—

"The youngster!"

Upholding thus his faltering spirit, his fainting body, for them he went on.

After long hours of suffering, of struggle, he found himself traveling through the dark, and it was some time before his blurred mind could know the reason—the moon had set.

From then on he must feel his way; the faint light from the sky helped not at all beneath the trees. And so, creeping, crawling, stumbling, groaning, praying, falling, his leg a living flame of torment, his hands and arms scraped and ground to the very quick, his face cut and scratched from his falls, his clothing torn to shreds, Dick Ansley went home.

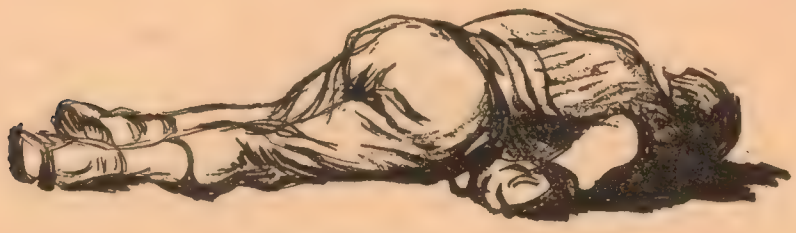
He reached the main road, turned, made his way along its frozen, snow-clad surface, reached his gate, turned in. The stars had paled and the first faint gray of dawn was in the sky as, blood-smeared, tortured, fainting, in the last stages of exhaustion, he dragged himself up the steps, beat on the door, called.

The door was flung open and the warm light streamed out over him; a woman stood before him, her hands pressed tight against her bosom. Dick Ansley heaved himself up on his hands, lifting his shoulders; his legs rested full length on the porch, but he raised his twisted countenance, drawn with suffering, to his wife.

"Mary!" he gasped. "For you—and the boy—'with such clear flame'—for you!"

And as his wife cried out, bent to raise him, his head drooped forward, his whole body relaxed, and Dick Ansley fell fainting across the doorsill.

He had come home.



# THE DUDE

## by FRANK H. SHAW

*Author of "The Out-of-Dates," "The King of Spades," etc.*

"GET rid of your high-falutin notions," Captain Wilson said, and there was a snap in his voice that caused Fosdyke to open his eyes. "I'll stand for no collar-an'-cuffs silly fatheadedness aboard any ship I command. Off with that spruce white linen of yours, an' turn to —get busy. Understand? Get busy an' keep on bein' busy; then you 'n' me might pull together. Otherwise——"

He left the alternative to Fosdyke's imagination; and as that imagination was a lively possession, the *Triumphant's* newly joined second mate began to realize that his lines had not fallen in pleasant places.

"But—in port, sir!" he said questioningly.

"Port or at sea's all the same to me," rasped Captain Wilson. "So long as you're aboard the *Triumphant* you work—an', mister, you work hard. This ship isn't licensed for passengers, so I don't believe in carrying 'em. Get down below an' bear a hand stowing the cargo under the deck beams. These stevedores 'ud cheat all——, but they won't cheat me."

Fosdyke made a bit of a sailorly bow and retired from the captain's room. He was conscious of disappointment. After a difficult eight years spent in hard-case sailing-ships, he had counted on securing something of the ease and dignity that belong to an officer in steam—one, moreover, who holds an extra master's certificate; but apparently his dreams were merely composed of the usual stuff of which dreams are made.

He discovered his own personal cabin—it was a smelly place, and had apparently been utilized, during the steamer's spell in port, for an impromptu dumping-ground—for all waste, refuse, spare parts, and such raffle as accumulates aboard a tramp steamer in dock—and with a bit of a sigh unlocked his chest. Then he sought about until he found well-washed dungarees—relics of days when he indulged in roseate dreams—and these he donned, discarding his present somewhat dandified attire.

As he made his way along the unfamiliar decks to the main hatchway, the mate of the *Triumphant*, Mr. Alec Munro, knocked on the captain's door, and, in reply to a gruff invitation, entered.

"I see the new second mate's joined up," he said with the hint of a sarcastic snigger in his voice. "As soft as putty—be hanged if I don't think he's got a monocle stowed away somewhere among his belongings!"

Captain Wilson tapped with a portentous forefinger on the mahogany table at which he was seated. He glanced from beneath his shaggy eyebrows at his second in command.

"Haze him!" he said curtly. "Ginger the blighter up. Take a round turn and two half-hitches round him, and make everything fast. We'll show him!"

From the subdued growl in his voice it was evident that the "showing" might in the end be a painful process for Mr. Fosdyke. For Captain Wilson and Mr. Munro belonged to the old school—they considered that all subordinates were, by the mere fact

of their junior position, condemned to servile labor and no courtesy.

"I'll see to it, sir—I've no use for his kind. He's one of the softies. He's the breed that thinks a job in steam means a clean collar every morning and nothing to do but walk the bridge with a telescope under his elbow. But—he'll learn when I set about him."

A look of complete understanding passed between the two. Captain Wilson nodded toward the door, which the mate shut close with almost exaggerated caution, and said—

"Well, what about a drink?"

The mate smacked his lips thirstily as his superior unlocked a locker door and produced a squat black bottle and a couple of tumblers. A substantial tot was poured into each glass. A little—a very little—water was added from the carafe taken down from the skipper's bottle-rack. The two men raised their glasses simultaneously.

"Here's how, sir!"

"Drink hearty!"

It was as if the imbibed alcohol broke down the normal barriers of reserve between captain and mate; Mr. Munro winked enjoyingly and coughed.

"Good stuff, that, sir."

"I've tasted worse. That drop of grog was a present from—Mr. Gyles. Talking o' Mr. Gyles reminds me—he more than half promised to send us down a man of his own choosing as second mate. I did recommend John Stringer. I thought he'd be useful when— Is that door shut?"

"Shut and locked," said the mate.

He carefully screwed up an open scuttle that gave on the foredeck before lifting his glass again and concentrating his narrow-eyed gaze on the captain.

"Stringer got knocked out in a row down Limehouse way last night," said Mr. Munro. "I was going to tell you, sir; but something cropped up. The police came down here aboard last night—three o'clock this morning, to be exact. Stringer'd given my name. I said I didn't know him."

"Just as well, if he was fool enough to get into trouble. Well, reckon he's out of it. There's you 'n' me still remainin'. We're enough to do the job. The fewer the better, I say. Every extra man means an extra risk—an' we can't afford to run risks at our time o' life. This second mate, now——"

"He's the softest thing I've ever run across, sir," said Mr. Munro, looking longingly at the black bottle. "But I'll put the wind up him a bit, too. He's one o' your soft an' simple fellows that think the world's run on the lines of story-book ideas."

For some reason best known to themselves the two hard-faced veterans indulged in rumbling chuckles. When the hiccoughing mirth subsided, Captain Wilson lifted the squat black bottle again, and its neck tinkled musically against his tumbler's rim.

"*Santy!*" he said largely. "Help yourself, mister."

The mate complied, this time with less water; but the glass was well filled notwithstanding.

"He's got a girl—one of these fluffy little things," informed Mr. Munro, wiping his lips on his sleeve. "I saw him take her photograph—in a silver frame—out of his chest and nail it up on his bulkhead."

The captain delivered himself of an indescribable sneer. It was evident that he held a poor opinion of women in general, and of sailors' fiancées in particular.

"Best not even let him get a hint of what's in the wind," he concluded.

"Trust me, sir! There's goin' to be no hitch this time."

"There mustn't be, mister. This packet's worth more on the floor of the Atlantic than she is afloat. It's your job an' mine to see she fails to make her port this trip. It's a clear thousand, an' maybe more, in your pocket, if the job's well done."

"Good money!"

Mr. Munro slapped his pocket, and a grim smile creased his lips.

"Well—let's get at it," said Captain Wilson, and rapped with horny knuckles on the mahogany table. The two men went into committee.

"Bad weather west o' the meridian o' thirty-five.

"Chief engineer's not above drinkin' a glass or two—at some one else's expense."

Had the carefully closed scuttle remained open it is possible that an eavesdropper might have heard such disjointed sentences trickling through between the hiss and rattle of hard-driven steam winches, the shouts of stevedores and the customary pandemonium that exists aboard a merchant steamer in port. But none was there to hear, and the two precious plotters were subjected to no interruptions.

Meantime Fosdyke, sweating, his face smeared with dirt, his very lungs aching from the quantities of choking dust they

had inhaled, labored in the hold. In his pocket was a crumpled copy of certain details of cargo due to be loaded; from time to time he consulted this document. He spoke sharply to a couple of stevedores, who were end-over-ending a weighty case along the hold-floor.

"Go easy with that," he said.

"Easy be blowed!" said one truculently, and deliberately swung the great box into a chasm formed by much highly piled cargo.

There was a splintering of wood and the thin screech of nails suddenly withdrawn from their holding.

"There, you've smashed it!" said Mr. Fosdyke, and referred to his notes.

The box—according to his references—was reputed to contain matter of infinite value. He dropped on his knees beside the splintered package and thrust a tentative hand within, through the broken wood. Then he whistled softly to himself, and looked again at his notes. When the stevedores broke off for a rest he sought out the carpenter.

"A hammer and chisel, sir?" quoth that tradesman. "Why, yes—here you are."

Mr. Fosdyke disappeared below with the implements. When the day's work was over he spent a considerable amount of time staring at the girl's photograph, which he had nailed to his cabin bulkhead. Later he indited a letter to her address.

"It may be we sha'n't have to wait until I get a command before we're able to marry," he wrote. "I won't say anything more just now, because I don't believe in raising false hopes; but—don't forget to mention me in your prayers——"

DURING the early days of the outward passage Fosdyke had no enviable existence. He admitted to himself that many rude shocks came his way. Before the *Triumphant* left port he had four times been on the point of throwing up his appointment; and only consciousness of the supreme difficulty of finding an alternative job restrained him.

Both Wilson and Munro did their utmost to make life a constant purgatory for this new officer. Their narrow souls were in revolt against his suggestion of superiority. They sneered openly at his fad of sitting down to meals with clean hands and face.

Bullies both, they conspired to belittle the second mate; and since bodily punishment was impossible they combined to perfect a system of mental torture that was more harassing than physical pain. They were coarse-souled, incapable of understanding a decent ideal, but Fosdyke stuck it out. He worked harder than most of the forecastle hands, and constant "hazing" created a curious bewildered numbness in his brain. Even so the instinct of discipline remained strongly within him.

Munro had had a command in sail, according to his own statement. The mate of the *Triumphant* studiously refrained from stating the reasons for his resignation of that command—the fact that he had once held such an exalted position made him an object of reverence to the second mate.

It was in the chops of the Channel that Munro paid an unexpected visit to Mr. Fosdyke's cabin. There was a smear of fog hanging blindingly on the face of the waters, and, in accordance with custom, the captain had taken charge. Mr. Munro had slipped below for a surreptitious pipe. His cabin door adjoined Fosdyke's; and as he rubbed cut plug tobacco between his palms, he looked across the narrow alleyway and observed the dandified second mate, his elbows on his table, staring at the framed photograph of the girl.

Mr. Munro grinned evilly, and apparently altered his mind in reference to the smoke. Instead he bit off a comprehensive plug of sweating tobacco, and rolled it between his tongue and his teeth. Then he stepped over his own door-sill and entered Fosdyke's room.

"Loafing again?" he inquired.

"I'm supposed to have the first dog-watch to myself anyway," said Fosdyke. "A man can't keep working all the time."

"He's got to, if he's goin' to please me," said Munro.

Then he pursed his lips and directed a brown stream of tobacco juice clean across the front of the framed photograph.

He followed up the insult with words that stung like red-hot irons. His remarks had reference to women in general, as he knew them, and to the original of the photograph in particular. Fosdyke leaped to his feet.

"You won't—" he began.

The mate side-stepped and hit him cleverly on the side of the head as he rushed. Then he ducked and butted Fosdyke painfully in the stomach. As the second mate

reeled sickly back against the bunk, the mate followed up, and inflicted heavy punishment.

He fought foully, as one of his breed might have been expected to fight. He used his sea-boots extravagantly.

Dazed, bruised and altogether aghast, Fosdyke picked himself up from the floor and watched his superior officer retire. He sat down limply on his little settee, and took his aching head between his hands.

Fosdyke stared at the defaced photograph. But for Maisie he would have deserted the *Triumphant* before she cleared the pier-heads—but he had promised to marry the girl, and a man may not establish a comfortable home for the woman of his choice by loafing around the shipping offices in fruitless search for employment.

"Wait a bit," he said thickly between his swollen lips.

Then he bowed his scarred face in his hands, and sick sobs shook him. On the bridge Mr. Munro walked largely on his heels, his hands thrust deeply into the pockets of his oilskin.

"Where you been?" Captain Wilson asked.

"Puttin' that second greaser through the mill—teachin' him a thing or two. He is as soft as putty, that slob—we haven't got any need to worry about him! Didn't put up any sort of a fight when I spat on his fancy wench's picture—he's no more bowels than a dogfish."

In the weather corner of the bridge the two were completely isolated. The man at the wheel was clean out of range of their hushed voices, snugged up in his steam-warmed wheelhouse, and very intent on his immediate task of keeping the lubber's line of the compass steadily fixed on the allotted degree that was the *Triumphant's* course.

"Then there's nothing to be afraid of from him?" said Wilson with curious emphasis.

"There's nothing to be scared of in that dude," asseverated the mate, spitting scornfully. "Collars an' cuffs never made a sailor yet—an' when a fellow's everlastingly mooning about thinking of a girl—Me? I think of 'em when I'm with 'em, and afterward forget 'em as fast as I can, —— 'em!"

"All the same—" Captain Wilson was not interested in his subordinate's variegated amours— "we'd better put him out o' the road at the time, eh?"

"Murder?" queried the mate uncompromisingly.

He was a man who had always prided himself on calling a spade a sanguinary shovel. He made a curious downward motion with his hand, as if indicative of the final settlement of Mr. Fosdyke's earthly career.

"Easy enough, too, in the rush. A tap with a hatch-batten, now—or just a dig with a knife-point; eh?"

Captain Wilson's stiff oilskins creaked as he shuddered.

"Not that word," he said thickly. "But if it could come about—accidentally, eh? I have heard of such things happening."

The mate snickered, and stared with a stony face into the fog.

"Not that there's anything to be scared of—us havin' made our plans," he said; "but—maybe he'd be better left behind. I'll see to it."

They went afresh into close details. They were determined to leave nothing whatsoever to chance; and even now, with the *Triumphant* barely embarked upon her final voyage, they plotted and planned to create an atmosphere of circumstantial evidence. A course was set that made the ship as uncomfortable as she well could be, and the forecastle hands growled at her vicious uneasiness, anathematizing her according to the customs of deep water.

No question about it, the *Triumphant* was already making a hog of herself. In spite of the comparative smallness of the sea she was dipping big water aboard with every sick plunge she gave.

MR. FOSDYKE found it difficult to wash off the stains of his recent encounter; but eventually this was done; and when he was again sane he carefully cleaned the soiled photograph.

"I did my best for you," he said; "but he didn't fight fair. That doesn't matter, though—I'll go on doing my best. It isn't the odds against a man that count so much, as the sort of fight he puts up against them. Well, I'll fight on."

And he opened a drawer beneath his bunk to stare contemplatively at a small parcel of dust and rough stones. This medley was wrapped in a fragment of newspaper; he had unloaded it from his pockets some little while before, having abstracted it from a broken package in the hold, which

package, according to the tally-marks, purported to contain valuable merchandise.

"SHE can't live till daylight," said Captain Wilson with an air of finality.

He spoke in a very loud voice for the benefit of the clustered knot of seamen at the foot of the bridge ladder.

"See the boats cleared away for lowerin'," he added.

"Aye, aye, sir," said Munro. "Bosun, fetch lanterns—bustle them shell-backs about a bit. Hands, see boats clear for lowerin'."

The *Triumphant* was laboring viciously in a high cross-sea. The gale had blown up thirty-six hours before, and every succeeding hour had witnessed a decided increase in its virulence. Now that dark night was on the face of the waters the bitterness of the high-leaping combers was mercifully shrouded from ordinary view; but the imaginations of men who had seen the Lord's wonders afloat through many years served them well.

A steady procession of spiteful combers raced over the steamer's decks and foamed mercilessly among such fragments of the overheavy deck cargo as still remained. There were sickening crashes, the groanings of strained timbers; occasionally a rope-lashing snapped with the clear venom of a pistol-shot.

Two hours before the carpenter had reported that water was making in the wells; and half an hour ago the chief engineer had stated that unless something in the nature of a miracle happened the stokehole fires would be drowned out. He came on the bridge to elaborate that report just as Mr. Munro went down to the boat-deck.

"She'll jar her propeller off any minute," he informed the captain with a wink that the darkness hid. "You give the word, sir, when you're ready—I'm on duty at the throttle."

"You might do it any time, now," said Wilson, his lips close against the engineer's ear. "Make enough fuss—that's all that's necessary. We've seen to the rest of it. Munro kicked the plugs out o' the rivet-holes an hour since."

"It's blowing a bit, though," observed the chief engineer apprehensively after a glance to windward. "Will the boats——"

"They'll last out all right; an' what's a wet jacket compared wi' what your share'll be? There's such things as sea-anchors an' oil-bags anyway."

They discussed the coming tragedy for a little while, what time the voices of the toiling sailors reached their ears through the whimper of the wind and the incessant slash of the seas. Then the chief engineer went down below to his engine-room.

He took charge of the throttle himself, and dispatched the donkeyman on an oiling expedition. Ten minutes later the *Triumphant's* engines broke into clamor, such as might arise when a throttle is opened to its fullest extent just when a steamer's stern kicks high on a wave crest. Then the hideous din subsided into a lurid calm.

"I warned 'em times without number against that crack in the propeller, boss, mark ye!" the chief engineer yelled to such as came clustering into the engine-room. "Up to the deck—up to the deck! Will ye drown here in the darkness?"

And the engine-room crowd were too busily engaged in thinking of their own safety to trouble about such minor matters as their duty. They clambered up the greasy ladders to the open air, and there joined the working units about the boats. Provisions were being passed from hand to hand; the *Triumphant* was throwing herself about viciously. The loud shouting of captain and mate—with the chief engineer's raucous voice to add to the uproar—did nothing to lessen the suggestion of calamity.

Fosdyke, remembering his discovery in the steamer's hold, ran up the bridge-ladder to where Captain Wilson stood, bawling profanity at the toilers.

"I warn you—" he shouted; "I warn you—it's barratry. You've been bribed to scuttle the ship——"

That was all he said. The gloom hid the crouching shape of Mr. Munro from his eyes; it also hid the upleaping hatch-batten—a sharp-edged bar of iron capable of inflicting a death-blow in capable hands.

"Right; let go!" said Wilson; and to the accompaniment of a dull crunching, Fosdyke rolled down the ladder.

He was kicked aside by the feet of men intent on their own safety.

"That's settled that dude's qualified hash!" said Mr. Munro, breathing somewhat stertorously. "There won't be any funny tales told so far as he's concerned."

Then the mate set about the business of

abandoning the doomed *Triumphant*. On his way to the boats he stumbled over the inanimate form of Fosdyke, and administered a heartfelt kick.

In that kick was all the resentment of an ignorant man for one of greater mental attainments than himself. He sprang tigerishly to where the lanterns glimmered, and his knotted fists grew busy.

"Get at it!" he roared. "Get at it! Want the perishin' ship to sink under your perishin' feet?"

The men worked like maniacs; and the equipped boats roared down into the noisy void beneath. Captain Wilson took his seat in the sternsheets of one boat; the mate settled himself at the tiller of the other.

"Oars—give way!" the two seniors bellowed. "Pull clear o' the suction—for your lives!"

The men pulled like frightened fiends. In the bow of the captain's boat a shrill-voiced trimmer set up a quavering wail of:

"Leave her, Johnny, leave her! Times are bad an' wages low; it's time for us to leave her!"

"She's goin'!" shouted Wilson. "Dig out —for your lives!"

The boats swept away into the strident gloom of the night. Presently they set a rag of canvas and scurried wildly before the wind, with oil-bags on either bow. They were making for the busier sea-lanes where succor might be expected for gallant mariners who, after battling nobly for their ship's safety, had recognized that the odds against them were too strong.

"IF IT hadn't been for that padded sou'wester," said Fosdyke, rubbing his aching head, "I'd have been scuppered."

He winced as his fingers disturbed the clotted blood and removed the headgear in question. He tentatively ran his fingers through his hair; then he carried their wet stickiness to his nostrils and felt suddenly sick, as men do at scent of their own blood. As yet his mind was a good deal of a blank; and the frenzied scream of the gale, coupled with the darkness, did little to bring about a greater clarity of thought.

The *Triumphant* wallowed comprehensively in the trough of a sea, and big water cascaded over her weather rail; some of it cut Fosdyke cruelly in the teeth, and the sting of the brine on his wound was excruciating.

"I've got to get out of this," he thought.

His own immediate safety was the paramount idea in his mind. He had for the nonce forgotten the crime of which he had become a victim. He was only dimly aware, indeed, that he had been mercilessly abandoned aboard a sinking ship. The sting of his hurt scalp was a bigger matter at that juncture than the villainy of Captain Wilson and Mr. Munro.

Instinct is a big thing in almost every human cosmos—it comes to the surface at the most unexpected times. Instinct led Fosdyke to his own cabin in search of easement from his suffering. There was a small portable medicine-chest, containing iodin and bandages somewhere in a drawer. The matter of his life loomed somewhat insignificantly by comparison with the local smart of pain.

The little cabin was in no wise different from when he deserted it in obedience to the shouted demands of Mr. Munro. Indeed, as he paused on the room's threshold, he seemed to hear afresh the mate's venomous voice—

"Come out, you white-livered loafer—scrimshankin' below when better men are fightin' for life!"

And Mr. Munro, he remembered dully, had accompanied the words with a lurching blow and a nasty kick from his heavy seaboats, calling him "dude" and "Nancy-boy."

He looked about the cabin with smarting eyes. The lamp was still burning, as he had left it. It reeled wildly in its gimbals, and a sudden bright flare of light shone across the girl's photograph.

Fosdyke lurched to the table and stared hot-eyed at the pictured face. Little by little the cloudiness in his brain dispersed.

"Not dead yet," he said. "Not dead—by a long chalk."

Within one second his brain had ceased to remind him of his own immediate need for safety and life, and had dictated a recrudescence of his hatred for both Wilson and Munro. With the dislike came recollection of his suspicions, which were more than suspicions.

"It 'ud be a stunning thing to do those two swine in the eye," he muttered.

Then he applied himself to the miniature medicine-chest, and as he anointed and

bandaged his wounded head he remembered that he was possessor of an extra master's certificate—obtained, moreover, in sailing-ships, where men learn handiness. That thought sent him out on deck again without so much as a backward glance at the photograph.

He found the wallowing hull deserted; and a bit of panic snatched at him; but he forced that emotion into subservience, and meditated for a moment or two beside a lifeboat through which Mr. Munro had thoughtfully crashed a heavy ax.

"Might make a raft. ——, I want to live!" he cried. "Do those bullies in the eye—expose 'em! If I turned up ashore and told my tale——"

"Not a soul would believe it—your word against a dozen's," seemed to come in mocking answer down the yelping wind.

"But—if I took the ship back?" he said breathlessly. "Could I?"

It was a startling and a splendid thought. It was a wave of madness stealing over him, of course; but—could it be done?

"Better to take it fighting than die like a rat in a trap," said the voice within him. "It's a big job, but you don't know how big you can be."

He stretched out his arms and felt strength, and a wild determination that was even more than strength, surge through him. The ship had not yet sunk. And there was a trivial lightening of the clamorous gloom which seemed to indicate that the slow dawn was not far distant.

"I'll have a shot for it," he said, and laughed.

Then he commenced his operations. He began by establishing a line of retreat for himself, in the event of his failing in the endeavor. A rough mass of broken timbers, bucket-racks, gratings was lashed together; on it he stowed a case of biscuit and a keg of water from one of the shattered boats. He worked briskly now—his muscles were like steel.

The dawn came as he toiled; he spared moments for a survey of his position, and discovered but little in it to give him joy. But—they had sneered at him, those men of a rougher school; they had glorified themselves and their abilities at his expense; and —he'd show them.

He looked overside; the *Triumphant* was wallowing deeply in the churning seas; but she was still afloat. And despite the savage blow on the head, from whose full force his sou'wester had saved him, his brain was working very clearly. He knew as much as the average man about the internal economy of a ship; and he found a lantern, which he carried below.

"Yes, I see," he muttered, watching the swirls where the Atlantic was entering. "They've drilled out rivets—well, we'll see."

He groped about, wet through and growingly weary, until he succeeded in locating the apertures by means of which the steamer's doom was to be brought about. Thereafter he worked in breathless spasms —now racing up to the wave-bleached deck for a glance at the ship's condition, now rummaging lockers, now diving below again. Leak by leak he plugged the spouting holes; and weariness kept afar from him. Eight o'clock came to show him a raging wilderness of vicious white and gray, with a horizon so narrowed in that it was impossible to see a mile. But the ship still floated.

He lighted a fire beneath the donkey-boiler, and, because of the hunger that was gnawing at him, ratched a meal from the cabin lockers—a better meal than any he had hitherto tasted aboard the *Triumphant*. As he ate he planned; at times his heart sank within him at the sheer magnitude of the task; but he refreshed himself with another glance or two at the framed photograph, which he now carried beneath his jacket, in case of a sudden need arising. Then he set out to discover more leaks.

Noon came and found him slaving valiantly, though the beginnings of tiredness were making themselves felt. Four o'clock, and there was a sufficient head of steam in the donkey-boilers to set the great main pumps going. He was afraid to test the wells; but at midnight he did so, and found that the encroaching water had ceased to make headway; more, the volume in the holds was even diminishing.

"Can do!" he said, and chuckled.

Then he regaled himself on brandy of a potency that made him cough and sneeze; but it heartened him for the terrific night's struggle. At dawn he moved like a man in a dream; but the pumps had been kept going steadily, and the water had decreased a little more. Nothing showed outboard; the thick weather held steadfastly; but the barometer was rising. He waited until full day—yellow and ominous—came; then he ate a hasty meal and coiled himself down

in the weather wing of the bridge, where he slept like the dead.

He wakened again after four hours of such sleep as few men enjoy, and went at it afresh. Success encouraged him to further efforts; the water was held in check handsomely; and a wilder idea than any before took possession of his ambitious soul. If he could only work the ship into port!

It was madness even to dream of such a possibility; but the idea fascinated by its very daring. He stoked up the donkey fires, oiled the running pumps carefully, and then departed to the engine-room. He was remembering with a glow of pride that he had qualified in steam; and now he was to reap the result of his laborious studies. He found steam enough in his precious donkey-boiler to actuate the turning-gear.

"I don't believe the propeller did drop off," he said as the shaft rotated. "If it hasn't——"

He wanted badly to satisfy himself; and since visual observation was the only way he went on deck and aft, where he did some exhausting work in the bight of a rope pendent from the *Triumphant's* stern. When he scrambled back to the deck, drenched through and much abraded as to hands and shins, he was grinning.

"We'll have a shot for it," he said; and went below again.

It was not easy work to fire one of the main boilers; but he did it. By next morning he had a sufficient head of steam to enable him to help the ship's rudder and keep her head into the wind; and the storm was diminishing hearteningly. For that day he slept in fitful snatches, and life became to him a wild nightmare of racing up and down greasy steel ladders, of spurting steam-jets, of a wind-swept, chilly bridge. But by midnight again the *Triumphant* was under control, and with steaming lights duly exhibited was heading—very slowly—back on her previous course.

Next morning, soon after dawn, Fosdyke was aroused by a savage roaring that made him dream for a moment of menageries broken loose; then he realized that a considerable steamer was standing off from him, blowing its siren raucously. She was a big ship, and she appeared well-found; and Fosdyke's tired soul yearned savagely toward her. It would be very easy to throw up the sponge now and clamor to be taken off; but—he clapped the megaphone to his mouth as the stranger ran closer, and shouted:

"Can you spare me a hand or two? I'm a bit short."

Presently a boat danced across the vigorous seas; an officer clambered aboard. He looked curiously about the disheveled decks, but he looked more curiously still at Fosdyke.

"We're bound Magellan way; but we can spare you two or three hands," he said. "What's happened?"

Fosdyke told him, and dropped upon the visitor's breast as the last word was spoken.

CAPTAIN WILSON and Mr. Munro paced jauntily up and down the deck of the intermediate liner that had brought them back to the land of their birth. They smoked affluent cigars.

"Not a bad old country—when you've a bit o' cash in your pockets," said Captain Wilson.

"Which we soon shall have," agreed the mate. "Well, we'll be ashore in an hour with any luck—here comes the pilot."

"Best get below and pack," said Wilson. "We can run over our yarn together—give it its final polish, eh? Then we'll call on Mr. Gyles one-time."

In the commodious cabin which they shared jointly they rehearsed their plausible story. It was a good story, painstakingly concocted; the same story as had been told to reporters on the Atlantic's other side.

"Don't forget about that dude second mate fallin' between the boat an' the hull," said Wilson. "Crushed like an egg, you know—cowardly attemptin' to take a place in the boat afore the word to abandon was given!"

"Catch me forgettin' anything," said the mate; and looked up as shadows darkened the doorway.

These were uniformed men, but they did not wear the uniform of the sea.

"John Wilson and Alec Munro—I arrest you both on a charge of attempted barratry," said the severest looking of the visitors. "You wilfully attempted to sink the *Triumphant*——"

"Prove it," said Wilson throatily. "She's at the bottom of the Atlantic."

"She's just outside, if you care to come and have a look," said the inspector. "The second mate brought her in yesterday."

"The dude!" gasped Munro.

Then he commenced to swear.

# The CAMP-FIRE

A MEETING-PLACE for READERS, WRITERS and ADVENTURERS

**Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.**

**We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.**

**But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.**

**Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.**

**If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.**

WHEN some of the fanatic alarmists and would-be trouble-breeders on either side of the Canadian-American line get all heated up it might cool them off a bit to look at the facts as mentioned by Barry Scobee in the following, bearing on his story in this issue:

Bellingham, Washington.

Long before it was written I had in my mind something of the story, "The Drought." It came to me because, I suppose, I was in the Southwest through the greatest drought in thirty years. We didn't see a rain for eleven months. In the course of that time, hunting, I climbed a mountain and found waterholes on top, dry then, and the bedding down places of deer, to get out of the cold. But it appeared to me the water had run from the last one, or moist one, only shortly before, because of a seep.

Cattle of course can smell water a good long distance when they are keened up to it by thirst. Experienced cattlemen of the Southwest agreed that, drying up from thirst, a cow might be able to scent the Rio Grande twenty miles, but not against the wind. In writing the story I had in mind that it was springs she smelled, and of course they would not have been anything like that distance off.

IN THE story I mention the "peace arch." This is a 60-foot monument at Blaine, on the Canadian border, a stone's throw from where the waters of the Pacific lap the shore. It is in honor of American-Canadian-English peace for 100 years, and is on the longest boundary in the world—3,000 miles, without a fort, an armed soldier, a gun.

Once I ran across an Indian map of trails cut into a flat stone, down on the edge of the rugged Chisos range of mountains, cut there undoubtedly hundreds of years ago. It was in the midst of an Indian arrowhead factory where were endless thousands of broken bits of arrow heads.—BARRY SCOBEE.

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WORD from old-timers of the West is always particularly good hearing at Camp-Fire and, in more ways than one, this comrade has the real Camp-Fire spirit:

Bandon, Ore.

While looking over the Camp-Fire of Nov. 20th, I noticed an article by C. C. C. of Hobart, Okla., which stirs up old memories.

During 1902, and into part of 1903, I was in Eastern Harney County, Oregon, during the trouble between the sheep and cattle men, and, while I did not know the officer by the name mentioned, I did know one who came to look over the situation—if

I remember correctly his name was Royer, U. S. Dep. Marshal. Came there representing himself to be a mining engineer, but did not fool the gang any. However, I heard that he got his men, and that was all he wanted, I guess.

HAVE been on the old "P" Ranch and heard the story of the "Old Man French." Also knew the "Gang" who once occupied the old "Big Foot Joe" place in big Cottonwood Cañon, some gang—and had some experiences there myself with plenty of action. As C. C. C. says, it was some country. I could tell some tales of the old cow-country but am no story writer. I knew the "Jack of Spades," old Montana R., poor old Billy Montgomery, six-shooter Pete, half-witted, but a character, and many others who helped to make up the locality at that time.

If C. C. C. or any of Camp-Fire want to know anything concerning that part of Eastern Oregon, Denio, Trout Creek, Wild Horse or thereabouts during my time, I would be glad to try to help. I have often wondered why some of your writers of good Western stories did not try to cover that part of the country.

While there I rode for the "Spur" outfit, also have been with the 7-S and S-wrench bunch, Miller & Lux, been on the old Spanish Ranch, White Horse and others.—A. A. A.

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DON'T forget that the originals of most *Adventure* cover paintings are for sale to the highest bidders. No bid of less than ten dollars per cover considered. Send in your bid any time. The paintings will be sent to the highest bidders express collect after July first. Bid for as many covers as you wish. It is a good idea to name a second choice, in case some one else puts in a higher bid for your favorite cover.

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A WORD from E. O. Foster in connection with his story in this issue:

"A Bit of a Sphit" is founded on fact. An officer was run out of the Army for spitting in the face of —— of my old company while on Cossack post. This same officer tried his best to put the screws on *Old Spud*, but the old harp tied him up in a knot.

The story is a rather true bit of description of Army life and there are many funny things that come out in courts martial. I had a case in Bordeaux in '19 where a man stole and sold a bag of sugar. The prosecutor had the bag in the room but did not identify it. I let him close his case, and summed up with the fact that the sugar had been "present, but not accounted for" and got an acquittal.

*Old Spud* was a student of Webster's and when he wanted to speak without a brogue could give a college professor cards and spades, but as he said, it came "aisier" to let his tongue follow its boyhood's trail through a bog of brogue.—E. O. Foster.

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OUR Camp-Fire Stations are spreading steadily over the map, and there is always room for a new one wherever a Camp-Fire comrade wishes to hang out the sign and bid welcome to the wanderers who come his way. List of Stations and outline of the idea follow.

A STATION may be in any shop, home or other reputable place. The only requirements are that a Station shall display the regular Station sign, provide a box or drawer for mail to be called for and preserve the register book.

No responsibility for mail is assumed by anybody; the Station merely uses ordinary care. Entries in register to be confined to name or serial number, route, destination, permanent address and such other brief notes or remarks as desired; each Station can impose its own limit on space to be used. Registers become permanent property of Station; signs remain property of this magazine, so that if there is due cause of complaint from members a Station can be discontinued by withdrawing sign.

A Station bulletin-board is strongly to be recommended as almost necessary. On it travelers can leave tips as to conditions of trails, etc., resident members can post their names and addresses, such hospitality as they care to offer, calls for any travelers who are familiar with countries these residents once knew, calls for particular men if they happen that way, etc., notices or tips about local facilities and conditions. Letters to resident members can be posted on this bulletin-board.

Any one who wishes is a member of Camp-Fire and therefore entitled to the above Station privileges subject to the Keeper's discretion. Those offering hospitality of any kind do so on their own responsibility and at their own risk and can therefore make any discriminations they see fit. Traveling members will naturally be expected to remember that they are merely guests and act accordingly.

A Station may offer only the required register and mail facilities or enlarge its scope to any degree it pleases. Its possibilities as headquarters for a local club or resident Camp-Fire members are excellent.

The only connection between a Station and this magazine is that stated above, and a Keeper is in no other way responsible to this magazine nor representative of it.

No. 50—ALABAMA—Fairfield. Percy E. Coleman, 405 Forty-fifth St.

No. 39—AUSTRALIA—Melbourne. William H. Turner, 52 Emmaline St., Northcote and Carters' and Drivers' Union, 46 William St.

No. 76— Melbourne. Chas. M. Healy, "Oora," Abbott St., Sandringham.

No. 44—CALIFORNIA—Oakland. Lewis F. Wilson, 836 Seventh Ave.

No. 28— Lost Hills. Mr. and Mrs. M. A. Monson, care of Gen. Pet. No. 2.

No. 38— Los Angeles. Colonel Wm. Strover, Westlake Military School, Mount Washington.

No. 60— San Bernardino. Charles A. Rouse, Hotel St. Augustine.

No. 73— Blythe. E. M. Cook, Box 256.

No. 74— Eagle Rock. John R. Finney, 109 Eddy Ave.
No. 89— Magalia, Butte Co., K. W. Mason.

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No. 30— Winnipeg, Man. Walter Peterson, 143 Kennedy St.
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No. 85— Ontario. J. Wonal, Simcoe St. S., Oshawa.

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No. 82— Baltimore. Joseph Patti, Jr., 4014 E. Lombard St.

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No. 94— St. Louis. C. Carter Lee, M. D., 3819 Olive St.

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No. 70—SPANISH HONDURAS. Jos. Buckly Taylor, La Ceiba.

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No. 99— Beaumont. D. E. Jonson, 784 Orleans St.

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No. 5— Milwaukee. Paul A. Buerger, Apt. 2, 150 Biddle St.
No. 72— Kenosha. Leland Birchard, 304 Marion Ave.

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SOMETHING from Talbot Mundy concerning his complete novel in this issue. If I did not know the facts and Mr. Mundy I might suspect that what he says about the real identity of *Jimgrim* were a neat bluff to add interest to his stories. It isn't.

New York City.

Petra, in Arabia, was practically unheard of for a thousand years until Burkhardt, the great explorer, rediscovered it, and even then there were plenty who refused to credit his account. Nobody knows who first began to build it, but it was certainly a city in the days of Abraham. Hadrian, the Roman emperor, built most of the outstanding features, and in his day it was a great center of trade, on the highroad between Egypt and Syria. Again, nobody knows how or why it became deserted and forgotten.

LAWRENCE (Allenby's famous young coadjutor, who swung the Arabs into line in the late war, as no other man in all history ever did) fought one of his biggest battles there, decisively beating the Turks by recruiting Bedouin women to reenforce his half-armed volunteers. He stationed many of the women in the "Treasury," described in the story, whence they poured a hot fire through the twelve-foot gap and withered the advancing Turks, who were already thrown into confusion by the rocks hurled down on them from the cliffs six hundred feet above.

THE storied resemblance between *Grim* and *Ali Higg* may raise a smile from the too knowing, who like to disbelieve coincidences. Well, the fact is that this story, like all the others about *Grim*, is founded on sheer fact. It isn't always fair to ask a man how much of his story is true and how much of it imagined (if it were, they couldn't run the newspapers!) and I'm under oath not to divulge the identity of the real *Grim*. But this much I got from *Grim* himself: A raid was at one time expected into Palestine from over-Jordan, by two parties of Bedouins, neither of which dared to tackle the job alone. If I remember rightly, each party numbered about three thousand men, and the southern party was commanded by a notorious fanatic, whose reputation had preceded him from Arabia. The northern party proposed to wait for the southern, so as to join forces; and if that had been accomplished, it would have been a nasty and expensive job to repel the raid.

Some one in the Jerusalem jail, however—some Arab friend of *Grim's*, whose lot he had gone to ease a little with cigarets and gossip—told him how closely he resembled this fanatical Arab leader over-Jordan. And, though it sounds incredible, *Grim* crossed the Jordan that night, introduced himself to the northern party of raiders as the redoubtable individual they were waiting for, told them that the southern force had played the coward and deserted him, and advised them to "beat it" for the hills before the British got after them. They took him at his word, and decamped. Hearing of that, by means of spies whom *Grim* sent down for the purpose, the southern force lost heart, deserted their furious leader, and the "raid" was over.

AS FOR the poison, and *Ayisha's* readiness to use it on *Ali Higg*, in order to kill him and attach herself to *Jimgrim*: Poison throughout the whole East, including Egypt, is the one weapon that everybody affects to despise, and almost everybody, who can afford it, uses. It is the bane of polygamy—the thorn in the side of the owner of several wives, and therefore always the politician's last—and often his first—resort. Jealousy among wives is an obvious weak place in a petty chief's armor, and poison the first thing the women usually think of. Divorce, for the man, is fabulously easy, but the laws weren't made for women, so if a junior wife bears a grudge or prefers another man, let her spouse beware! Poison and superstition are the two chief means by which leadership is made to change hands.

ONE other point about impersonation; it is commoner than supposed. An historical instance, alluded to in Burton's "First Footsteps in East Africa," is that of the Queen Talwambara, whose husband was slain in battle by the combined force of Portuguese and Abyssinians. To prevent panic and consequent destruction of the host of Al-Islam,

the queen caused a slave, who resembled him, to take her fallen husband's place. He succeeded in rallying the Arab army and conducting an orderly retreat; nor did they learn until some time afterward that another had been posing as the king. There are numerous similar instances on record.

THE original of *Grim*—he is an American, and very much alive—has the peculiar and highly developed gift of passing himself for an Arab. He has actually made the pilgrimage to Mecca more than once—on one occasion overland, and once by train. I only hope I have disguised his identity sufficiently to satisfy his strict injunctions on that point. He is not a good talker about himself, but he has promised to give me the "makings" of a lot more yarns "some day," subject to that one proviso, that I give no clue to his real name.

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**Help!**

I SURELY need it. Here's the case. A fellow has to eat and sleep and, if he has any sense, he ought to exercise and play a little. In other words, there are just so many hours a day for work. You can increase the number of work-hours per day for a while, but you can't keep up the extra strain indefinitely.

I'm up against it. Can't get my work done, even adding the extra hours as long as I can get away with it. It's no fun for me and look how the work suffers. For example, here's our Camp-Fire expedition. Tremendous interest in the office as well as among you. Ready to go right along as fast as I can handle my end of it. And look at my delay in getting opinions before you. Ought to have had in "Camp-Fire" before this a voting blank so all of you could register your opinions definitely and systematically.

Our Camp-Fire Stations, too. Months ago we in the office made out a list of forty or fifty suggestions for making the Stations more valuable and interesting. Selections ought to have been made from that list and put into operation long ago. But the list is buried in my desk.

READING manuscripts from which to choose stories for our magazine. I *have* to keep up with that work, but in the past year or so I haven't been able to read a dozen at the office. True, part of my office hours are put in at home, but it takes more time than that to read all that must be read. Also, there's a limit to night-work for eyes. And there's no time at the office for it.

Besides expedition and Stations there are a dozen other things that should be worked on for the good of Camp-Fire and the magazine. But I can't get time to work on them and nothing happens. Even this that I'm writing now is being done in bed when I ought to be asleep. Tomorrow morning I must get some "copy" for "Camp-Fire" to the printer (it's overdue), answer what I can of a basket of letters, make the week's final selection of stories for purchase and attend to a dozen other things. Even working at night I can't possibly get through. Haven't been "through" since vacation last Summer and put in one week's office time while away on three weeks' vacation.

Something has to be done and I don't hesitate to call on you, for it is your interests that are suffering.

THE three things that eat up my time and crowd out other things are "Camp-Fire," correspondence and talking to people. All are necessary, but work on them must be cut down or passed over to some one else.

I can't figure any way of reducing work on "Camp-Fire." It doesn't look like it, but it takes a lot and for years we've not been able to find any way of making it quick and easy. As to passing part of my work on it to some of the others, I not only don't want to but it is a one-man job. Mr. Cox already makes it up into page-form and handles the printer's end of it. As to letting some one else be the one man, well, I won't. I've been piling the wood on our fire so long that I couldn't be happy if I quit. Also, even if the new man handled it better, it would mean a decided change in the character of "Camp-Fire" and most of you have got as used to its present form as I have. He'd have to spend a year or two just getting acquainted before he could really get his hooks in. No, I won't let go of it till I'm kicked out.

TALKING to people, then? Yes, this can be reduced. Day before yesterday I spent doing nothing else. Didn't even get my mail opened till fifteen minutes of closing time. Part of the talking is with the office people, part with writers, part with friendly visitors from among you. Part of the talking is necessary and nearly all of it is pleasant enough. But sometimes there are calamities. Generally the other person takes no more time than he needs,

and, as a general rule, the more important his business, the less likely he is to waste time. Our writers' brigade seldom take more time than is needed, but sometimes a writer who's never sold us a story, and probably never will be able to write one we could use, will take half a day if you let him. He tells you his entire personal history, what all his friends think of his work, about every story he's ever sold to any magazine or paper, how good they are, topics of the day—gas in general. You all know the type.

The other day a writer I'd never heard of came in to ask me to get him a collaborator. As explained in a printed letter, we are unable to supply collaborators and his business could have been settled in a few polite sentences. I tried to settle it that way. Nothing doing. He told me his story just the same—all of it. He continued to ask me for a collaborator. He strove to prove to me that I could when I couldn't. Mr. Barretto came to the door and waved a hurry job at me; he must have seen it, but it didn't even interrupt his oratory.

His type are in the minority, but it doesn't take many of them to ruin a lot of time.

NOT long ago one of our "A. A." editors came to town and was sore because I simply couldn't take time for a nice long visit with him. Took it as a personal affront. I couldn't have stopped to talk with the Angel Gabriel that day. *He* couldn't see the work piled on my desk, nor the other people after my time. It didn't occur to him that I'd much *rather* spend a few hours in interesting talk than in working, but that the work has to be done. If not in office hours, then by burning the midnight oil.

The help you can give me in this matter is merely to remember that you are not the *only* visitor for that day and not the *only* call on my time. But for heaven's sake don't stop coming in and don't get the idea that I don't want to see you or that I won't take all the time for it I can. Some of you come in "just to shake hands and say howdy" when passing through; I'd hate most of all to have these friendly callers stop coming.

Correspondence is a similar case and here most of all I ask your help and understanding. This month I've dictated some 630 personal letters. Also have hand-written quite a number. Add memos to others in the office. Add heaven knows how many form letters answering letters that have to be read before I can know how to answer them. Add the fact that many of the letters received are hand-written and take much time to read. Add that many letters have to be passed on to others for attention to various points, often a number of points and people for one letter. Add that these letters cover every subject under heaven, not merely the business of running a magazine. Add that most of them are from people you can't—and don't want to—answer with a few snappy, business-like sentences, like "yours received and contents noted. Assure you the matter will have our earliest attention."

My trouble is that not answering a personal letter personally and with full attention seems on a par with refusing to reply when some one speaks to you. But something *has* to be done. So I'm putting it up to you. For eleven years I've certainly proved my desire to talk to you personally every time you give me a chance. Now, when I find myself *unable* to do so, I'm asking you to take the will for the deed. I'll do it whenever I can, be sure of that; when I can't I want you to know I want to.

WHATEVER you do, don't stop writing in. I'll be reading letters even when I can't answer them personally. If for no other reason, one of my most important duties is to read your letters, get into my head the stories and authors you like or dislike, profit by your general and specific criticism, and weight carefully all your suggestions for any part of our magazine. Also, I'd be lonely as —— if I didn't keep hearing from you, especially my old friends among you.

Remember, too, that F. K. Noyes is nearly as thoroughly identified with our magazine as I am and is just as ready to chat and discuss with you. The number of you already writing to him proves that. J. E. Cox and L. B. Barretto also have been with us for years and are *of* us. So are the others of the staff, but these three are the old-timers.

To sum up, keep right on writing in. All I ask is that you *understand*—that, if my letters are shorter than they used to be, it's only because I *can't* make 'em otherwise.—A. S. H.

# VARIOUS PRACTICAL SERVICES FREE TO ANY READER

**These services of *Adventure* are free to any one.** They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we offer them gladly and ask in return only that you **read and observe the simple rules,** thus saving needless delay and trouble for us. The whole spirit of the magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we can help we're ready and willing to try. **Remember: Magazines are made up ahead of time. Allow for two or three months between sending and publication.**

## Identification Cards

Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address, (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, each printed in English French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure*, New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one or two friends, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

**Metal Cards**—For twenty-five cents we will send you, *post-paid*, the same card in aluminum composition, perforated at each end. Enclose a self-addressed return envelope, but no postage. Twenty-five cents covers everything. Give same data as for pasteboard cards. Holders of pasteboard cards can be registered under both pasteboard and metal cards if desired, but old numbers can not be duplicated on metal cards. If you no longer wish your old card, destroy it carefully and notify us, to avoid confusion and possible false alarms to your friends registered under that card.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of sel and friend or friends when applying.*

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

## Mail Address and Forwarding Service

This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied. Unclaimed mail which we have held for a long period is listed on the last page of the last issue of each month.

## Missing Friends or Relatives

Our free service department "Lost Trails" in the pages following, though frequently used in cases where detective agencies, newspapers, and all other methods have failed, or for finding people long since dead, has located a very high percentage of those inquired for. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

## Back Issues of *Adventure*

*The Boston Magazine Exchange,* 109 *Mountfort St., Boston, Mass., can supply* Adventure *back through* 1918, *and occasional copies before that.*

WILL SELL or exchange: April, 1921 to date; twenty-four copies of *Adventure*, Mid-March, 1920 to Mid-March, 1921.—Address C. F. MEIER, Rt. 4, Perry, Iowa.

WILL BUY: All of 1916 issues.—Address EDWARD SCHMOLL, 200 South First St., S. S., Pittsburgh, Pa.

## Manuscripts

Glad to look at any manuscript. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers. *It is not necessary to write asking to submit your work.*

When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use almost no fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators. Use fiction of almost any length; under 3,000 welcomed.

## Camp-Fire Stations

Our Camp-Fire is extending its Stations all over the world. Any one belongs who wishes to. Any member desiring to meet those who are still hitting the trails may maintain a Station in his home or shop where wanderers may call and receive such hospitality as the Keeper wishes to offer. The only requirements are that the Station display the regular sign, provide a box for mail to be called for and keep the regular register book and maintain his Station in good repute. Otherwise Keepers run their Stations to suit themselves and are not responsible to this magazine or representative of it. List of Stations and further details are published in the Camp-Fire in the first issue of each month.

## Camp-Fire Buttons

To be worn on lapel of coat by members of Camp-Fire—any one belongs who wishes to. Enameled in dark colors representing earth, sea and sky, and bears the numeral 71—the sum of the letters of the word Camp-Fire valued according to position in the alphabet. Very small and inconspicuous. Designed to indicate the common interest which is the only requisite for membership in Camp-Fire and to enable members to recognize each other when they meet in far places or at home. Twenty-five cents, post-paid, anywhere.

When sending for the button enclose a strong, self-addressed, *un*stamped envelope.

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

## General Questions from Readers

In addition to our free service department "Ask Adventure" on the pages following, *Adventure* can sometimes answer other questions within our general field. When it can, it will. Expeditions and employment excepted.

## Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

## Addresses

**Camp-Fire**—Any one belongs who wishes to.

**Rifle Clubs**—Address Nat. Rifle Assn. of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(*See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure."*)

# Ask Adventure

**A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.**

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the section in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert may give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided stamped and addressed envelop is enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunties, but, only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose section it seems to belong.**

**1. The Sea Part 1**
BERIAH BROWN, 1624 Biegelow Ave., Olympia, Wash. Ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting, small-boat sailing; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S.; fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks. (*See next section.*)

**2. ★ The Sea Part 2**
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, Hamilton, Bermuda. Questions on the sea, ships and men local to the British Empire go to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Brown. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

**3. ★ Islands and Coasts**
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, Hamilton, Bermuda. Islands of Indian and Atlantic oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits. Ports, trade, peoples, travel. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

**4. ★ New Zealand; and the South Sea Islands Part 1**
TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand. New Zealand, Cook Islands, Samoa. Travel, history, customs; adventure, exploring, sport. (*Postage 8 cents.*)

**5. South Sea Islands Part 2**
CHARLES BROWN, JR., 213 E St., San Rafael, Calif. French Oceania (Tahiti, the Society, Paumoto, Marquesas); Islands of Western Pacific (Solomons, New Hebrides, Fiji, Tonga); of Central Pacific (Guam, Ladrone, Pelew, Caroline, Marshall, Gilbert, Ellice); of the Detached (Wallis, Penrhyn, Danger, Easter, Rotuma, Futuna, Pitcairn). Natives, history, travel, sports, equipment, climate, living conditions, commerce, pearling, vanilla and coconut culture.

**6. ★ Australia and Tasmania**
ALBERT GOLDIE, Sydney Press Club, 51 Elizabeth St., Sydney, Australia. Customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, history. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

**7. Malaysia, Sumatra and Java**
FAY-COOPER COLE, Ph. D., Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, Ill. Hunting and fishing, exploring, commerce, natives, history, institutions.

**8. New Guinea**
DR. ALBERT BUELL LEWIS, Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, Ill. Hunting and fishing, exploring, commerce, natives, history, institutions.

**9. Philippine Islands**
BUCK CONNOR, P. O. Box 202, Hollywood, Calif. History, natives, topography, customs, travel, hunting, fishing, minerals, agriculture, commerce.

**10. Hawaiian Islands and China**
F. J. HALTON, 714 Marquette Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Customs, travel, natural history, resources, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

**11. Japan**
GRACE P. T. KNUDSON, Castine, Me. Commerce, politics, people, customs, history, geography, travel, agriculture, art, curios.

**12. Asia, Southern**
CAPTAIN BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, 1315 Josephine St., New Orleans, La. Arabia, Persia, India, Tibet, Burma, western China, Borneo. Hunting, exploring, traveling, customs.

**13. Africa Part 1**
THOMAS S. MILLER, Carmel, Monterey Co., Calif. Gold, Ivory and Fever Coasts of West Africa, Niger River to Jebba, northern Nigeria. Canoeing, labor, trails, trade, expenses, outfitting, flora, tribal histories, witchcraft.

**14. ★ Africa Part 2 Transvaal, N. W. and Southern Rhodesia, British East, Uganda and the Upper Congo**
CHARLES BEADLE, Ile de Lerne, par Vannes, Morbihan, Brittany, France. Geography, hunting, equipment, trading, climate, transport, customs, living conditions, witchcraft, adventure and sport. (*Postage 12 cents.*)

★ (*Enclose addressed envelop with 5 cents—in Mr. Beadle's case 12 cents—in stamps NOT attached*)

**15. Africa Part 3 Cape Colony, Orange River Colony, Natal and Zululand**
CAPTAIN F. J. FRANKLIN, care Adventurers' Club of Chicago, 40 South Clark St., Chicago, Ill. Climate, shooting and fishing, imports and exports; health resorts, minerals, direct shipping routes from U. S., living conditions, travel, opportunities for employment. Free booklets on: Orange-growing, apple-growing, sugar-growing, maize-growing; viticulture; sheep and fruit ranching.

**16. ✠ Africa Part 4 Portuguese East**
R. G. WARING, Corunna, Ontario, Canada. Trade, produce, climate, opportunities, game, wild life, travel, expenses, outfits, health, etc. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

**17. Africa Part 5 Morocco**
GEORGE E. HOLT, Frederick, Md. Travel, tribes, customs, history, topography, trade.

**18. Africa Part 6 Tripoli**
CAPTAIN BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, 1315 Josephine Street, New Orleans, La. Including the Sahara Tuaregs and caravan routes. Traveling, exploring, customs, caravan trade.

**19. Africa Part 7 Egypt and Barbary States**
J. L. BINDA, National Foreign Trade Council, 1 Hanover Sq., New York. Egypt and Sudan, Tunis, Algeria. Travel, history, ancient and modern; monuments, languages, races, customs, commerce.

**20. Turkey and Asia Minor**
J. L. BINDA, National Foreign Trade Council, 1 Hanover Sq., New York. Travel, history, geography, races, languages, customs, trade opportunities.

**21. Balkans**
J. L. BINDA, National Foreign Trade Council, 1 Hanover Sq., New York. Greece, Albania, Jugo-Slavia, Bulgaria, Roumania. Travel, history, topography, languages, customs, trade opportunities.

**22. South America Part 1**
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure*. Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile. Geography, inhabitants, history, industries, topography, minerals, game, languages, customs.

**23. South America Part 2**
P. H. GOLDSMITH, *Inter-American Magazine*, 407 West 117th St., New York, N. Y. Venezuela, the Guianas, Brazil (except Pará and Amazonas), Uruguay, Paraguay and Argentine Republic. Travel, history, customs, industries, topography, natives, languages, hunting and fishing.

**24. South America Part 3**
ALGOT LANGE, care *Adventure*. Pará and Amazonas, Brazil. Topography, customs, hunting, fishing, agriculture, lumber, industry, climate and health.

**25. Central America**
CHARLES BELL EMERSON, 90 S. Orchard St., San José, Calif. Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, languages, game, conditions, minerals, trading.

**26. Mexico Part 1 Northern**
J. W. WHITEAKER, 1505 W. 10th St., Austin, Tex. Border States of old Mexico—Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas. Minerals, lumbering, agriculture, travel, customs, topography, climate, natives, hunting, history, industries.

**27. Mexico Part 2 Southern; and Lower California**
C. R. MAHAFFEY, Topolobampo, Sinaloa, Mexico. Lower California; Mexico south of a line from Tampico to Mazatlan. Mining, agriculture, topography, travel, hunting, lumbering, history, natives, business and general conditions.

**28. ✠ Canada Part 1**
S. E. SANGSTER ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Height of Land and northern Quebec and Ontario (except strip between Minn. and C. P. Ry.); southeastern Ungava and Keewatin. Sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber, customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

**29. ✠ Canada Part 2**
HARRY M. MOORE, Deseronto, Ont., Canada. Ottawa Valley and southeastern Ontario. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, mining, lumbering, agriculture, topography, travel, camping, aviation. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

**30. ✠ Canada Part 3**
GEORGE L. CATTON, Tweed, Ont., Canada. Georgian Bay and southern Ontario. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

**31. Canada Part 4**
T. F. PHILLIPS, Department of Science, Duluth Central High School, Duluth, Minn. Hunters Island and English River district. Fishing, camping, hunting, trapping, canoeing, climate, topography, travel.

**32. Canada Part 5**
ED. L. CARSON, La Connor, Wash. Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta including Peace River district; to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game, minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

**33. ✠ Canada Part 6**
REECE H. HAGUE, The Pas, Manoitba, Canada. Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Mackenzie and northern Keewatin. Homesteading, mining, hunting, trapping, lumbering and travel. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

**34. ✠ Canada Part 7**
JAS. F. B. BELFORD, Codrington, Ont., Canada. New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and southeastern Quebec. Hunting, fishing, lumbering, camping, trapping, auto and canoe trips, history, topography, farming, homesteading, mining, paper industry, water-power. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

**35. Alaska**
THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 2837 Fulton St., Berkeley, Calif. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipment, clothing, food; physics, hygiene; mountain work.

**36. Western U. S. Part 1**
E. E. HARRIMAN, 2303 W. 23rd St., Los Angeles, Calif. California, Oregon, Washington, Utah, Nevada, Arizona. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

**37. Western U. S. Part 2**
J. W. WHITEAKER, 1505 W. 10th St., Austin, Tex. Texas and Oklahoma. Minerals, agriculture, travel, topography, climate, hunting, history, industries.

**38. Middle Western U. S. Part 1**
JOSEPH MILLS HANSON (lately Capt. A. E. F.), care *Adventure*. The Dakotas, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas. Hunting, fishing, travel. Especially, early history of Missouri Valley.

**39. Middle Western U. S. Part 2**
JOHN B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Missouri, Arkansas and the Missouri Valley up to Sioux City, Iowa. Wilder countries of the Ozarks, and swamps; hunting, fishing, trapping, farming, mining and range lands; big-timber sections.

**40. Middle Western U. S. Part 3**
J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota and Lake Michigan. Fishing, clamming, hunting, trapping, lumbering, canoeing, camping, guides, outfits, motoring, agriculture, minerals, natural history, early history, legends.

**41. Eastern U. S. Part 1**
RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Little Falls, N. Y. Mississippi, Ohio, Tennessee, Michigan and Hudson valleys; Great Lakes, Adirondacks, automobile, motorcycle, bicycle and pedestrian touring; shanty-boating; river tripping; outfit suggestions, including those for the transcontinental trails; game, fish and woodcraft; furs, fresh-water pearls, herbs, and their markets.

**42. Eastern U. S. Part 2**
HOWARD A. SHANNON, *Alexandria Gazette*, Alexandria, Va. Motor-boat and canoe cruising on Delaware and Chesapeake Bays and tributary rivers. Motor-boat equipment and management. Oystering, crabbing, eeling, black bass, pike, sea-trout, croakers; general fishing in tidal waters. Trapping and trucking on Chesapeake Bay. Water fowl and upland game in Maryland and Virginia. Early history of Delaware, Virginia and Maryland.

**43. Eastern U. S. Part 3**
HAPSBURG LIEBE, Orlando, Fla. Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, N. and S. Carolina, Florida and Georgia except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

**44. Eastern U. S. Part 4**
DR. G. E. HATHORNE, 79 Main Street, Bangor, Me. Maine. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

## WEAPONS, PAST and PRESENT

Rifles, shotguns, pistols, revolvers, ammunition and edged weapons. (Any questions on the arms adapted to a particular locality should *not* be sent to this department but to the "Ask Adventure" editor covering the district.)

**A.—All Shotguns**, including foreign and American makes; wing shooting. J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

**B.—All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers**, including foreign and American makes. DONEGAN WIGGINS, R. F. D. 3, Lock Box 75, Salem, Ore.

**C.—Edged Weapons, and Firearms Prior to 1800.** Swords, pikes, knives, battle-axes, etc., and all firearms of the flintlock, matchlock, wheel-lock and snaphaunce varieties. LEWIS APPLETON BARKER, 40 University Road, Brookline, Mass.

✠ (*Enclose addressed envelop with 3 cents in stamps NOT attached*)

## OLD SONGS THAT MEN HAVE SUNG

ROBERT FROTHINGHAM, 745 Riverside Drive, New York City. A department for collecting hitherto unpublished specimens and for answering questions concerning all songs of the out-of-doors that have had sufficient virility to outlast their immediate day; chanteys, "forebitters," ballads —songs of outdoor men—sailors, lumberjacks, soldiers, cowboys, pioneers, rivermen, canal-men, men of the Great Lakes, voyageurs, railroad men, miners, hoboes, plantation hands, etc.

## FISHING IN NORTH AMERICA

**Salt and Fresh Water Fishing**

J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Covering fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting and advice; live bait; camping-outfits; fishing-trips.

## MOUNTAINS and MOUNTAINEERING

Especially of New England. ARTHUR BENT, Appalachian Mountain Club, 1050 Tremont Bldg., Boston, Mass.

## STANDING INFORMATION

For information on trade in any part of the world, address J. L. BINDA, National Foreign Trade Council, 1 Hanover Sq., New York.

For general information on U. S. and its possessions, write Supt. of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications.

For the Philippines, Porto Rico, and customs receiverships in Santo Domingo and Haiti, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dept., Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, T. H. Also, Dept. of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dept. of Agri., Com. and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

The Pan-American Union may be called upon for general information relating to Latin-American matters or for specific data. Address L. S. ROWE, Dir. Gen., Wash., D. C.

For R. C. M. P., Commissioner Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can. Only unmarried British subjects, age 18 to 40, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal Com., Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dept. of Com., Wash., D. C.

### Arkansas' Diamond Mine

IN THE Nov. 30, 1921 issue of "A. A." Mr. Thompson said in reply to a question that there was a diamond-mine in Arkansas, but that the stones were of little use. Now it appears that one was discovered in the famous Pike County in 1920 or thereabout, and that thousands of stones of the best quality are being taken out. One was presented to the new leader of the American Legion, I believe. Some friend encloses a newspaper clipping showing that Pike County is now a premier producer of peaches, diamonds, asphalt and oil. Some county, I'll say. This clipping, by the way, is not the one referred to in the subjoined correspondence:

*Question:*—"I am enclosing herewith clipping taken from the *Arkansas Gazette*, the leading Arkansas paper, that tells you more about the Arkansas diamonds. The *Gazette* seems to resent the answer you gave, but I think you are honestly mistaken and ask you to please correct in the *Adventure* as soon as possible.—E. R. COLBERT, Prescott, Ark.

*Answer*, by Mr. Thompson:—I thank you very much for your courteous correction of my statement. I have been *en route* a great deal lately, and that is one reason why you had no earlier reply.

I have prospected in that country five times within the last twenty years, and found what I mentioned in the county north. Just two weeks before the inquiry came to me I was in Hot Springs talking of my early find and one another made, and now I am very much surprized no one mentioned the diamond-mine to me. This is what led me to such hasty conclusion. In fact, to be frank, I did not know any better, though I wrote to people in Arkansas who should have known before answering the query, and they knew nothing of the diamond-mine.

While it is folly for me to resent the newspapers' criticism as though it were meant as an offense to me, I should like them to know that not only have I lived in Arkansas, but now live on Current River, but three miles from the line, and furthermore have hunted in many parts of the State with Ex-Governor Davis.

Rather a singular thing what this answer brought about. A letter was forwarded to me to Mammoth Springs from some one signing himself "Arkansan" and told me I knew nothing about the State nor where the famous Mammoth Springs were. Some letters were very insulting. So I did not answer them. Instead of being a knocker of Arkansas, for nearly twenty years while writing feature stuff for outdoor papers I have done as much as any single man living, without being paid a cent for it, to call the attention of people to the opportunities to be found in your State. One of the advertising men of the largest railway entering your State will vouch for this. So you see why I did not answer the editorial, for it was the most un-Southern way of calling a man down for an unintentional mistake; yet in the excitement they made several mistakes about me.

### The Kalmucks

AN INTERESTING tribe that is 'way behind the times, and glad of it:

*Question:*—"Please tell me what you know about the Kalmucks. Have you any personal experience with that nation, of whom I hear there are quite a number somewhere in China?

Where do the Kalmucks live at the present time? Are they still free to have some government of their own? Are they not in danger of modern Bolshevism?

I would be glad to hear if they still live their own life, not influenced by modern powers.

How would it be to travel among the Kalmucks? Would it be easy to be friends with these people and possible to get in with them and live, marry and stay with them?

Are their girls pretty and faithful in married life? Are they unspoiled of modern thought? Do the Kalmucks still cling to the simple way of living today?

Are they very much in danger of starving on account of there being so much famine and starvation in Russia and China?

How do they marry? Are these people friendly? Are they still nomads or partly farmers? What would be the nearest route to go there?"—CHRISTIAN BAYER, Goose Creek, Tex.

*Answer*, by Capt. Giddings:—The Kalmucks are a nomadic Mongol race, inhabiting parts of western China, Siberia and Russia, and as yet have been very little influenced by the progress of their neighbors. Being of a happy temperament and under no oppression, they are in no danger of adopting Bolshevism.

They are fine horsemen and have been great warriors from very early times. Breeding of live stock is the principal source of maintenance.

They live in felt tents, of almost the same shape as the American Indian wigwam. In the center is an iron fireplace, in which dried cattle dung is burned, and the smoke finds its exit through a hole in the roof—or at least is supposed to. Pieces of felt and sheepskins serve as beds.

These people are friendly and hospitable, fond of horse-racing and athletic sports; but their mode of living renders them not overclean, and vermin is prevalent. They certainly still cling to the primitive ways of living; their ox-carts are the same now as were in use seven centuries ago.

The girls are not attractive to the European eye; neither, according to our standards, are they overclean. They very much resemble the coarser type of Chinese women.

Famine indeed is rare. Their flocks and herds, well tended and shifted continually to good pasturage, are ample guarantee of a plentiful food supply. The majority are nomadic, as I say; but I believe a few have settled permanently in the hilly, wooded regions.

To get to them I would suggest going to Peking, China; thence northward and west by caravan, skirting the Desert of Gobi. It might be safer to take the Trans-Siberian Railroad to Irkutsk, Siberia, and drop southward from there.

### Java

DID you know that it has a population of 30,000,000? . . . Neither did I:

*Question*:—"I would like to get some information regarding a young man's chance in Java. The following are the main questions, but any other detailed information or advice will be greatly appreciated.

What chances are there in Java for employment? I am 26 years of age, high-school education, have followed the sea for awhile, traveled a good deal, served in the Canadian Army and the U. S. Navy, used to outdoor work, and have a fair knowledge of office routine, and foreign trade. Are there any opportunities for an electrical engineer?

How is the climate, also how are the living conditions, low or high? What language is generally used? Have you any idea as to the number of white people?

What is the best way to get there, over what lines; amount passage would cost? Are there any chances to work my passage out?

What do you think of my idea to go there? Do you think it will be worth my while? Do you know of any place that would be better suited for a young man?

Should you have any other advice or information to offer, I can assure you it will be deeply appreciated.

In case of use by *Adventure* please omit name."—E. B., Philadelphia, Pa.

*Answer*, by Capt. Dingle:—In a population of about 30,000,000, Java has something like 60,000 whites. Climate is very good—I found living conditions very agreeable—but of course if you stay in the lowest levels among the most luxuriant jungle lands, you'll find it moist and oppressive.

Holland owns and governs Java, and most concerns of course are Dutch. I don't know how you would get on there in your profession, but I believe you could at least find a good job and have decent prospects if you made yourself familiar with the language and requirements of the people of the country.

As for ways of getting there, you'd take a long time working your way, simply because you'd have either to transship several times or wait for a ship bound direct to Batavia, and in either case passage workers might not be in demand when you wanted to ship. To pay passage you would go by Holland-American Line to Amsterdam or Rotterdam, and thence by Dutch East Indies Mail to Batavia, where, by the way, the great docks ought to provide as good a chance as any place for your start.

Cost of passage, as of living, is beyond me in these days of rapid changes. Write any steamship agent for fares.

Cost of living in the Java cities used to be much below American costs. I suppose now they are three times as high as pre-war; but in any case your salary will be sufficient to meet expenses and leave some over.

As for what I think of your notion, I think you have much better opportunities right next door in Porto Rico today. Java sounds more romantic perhaps, but it's a sleepy old land, outside of the one or two busy ports.

### Wants a Soft Job in a Lumber Camp

SO DO the lumberjacks, I betcha. Anyway, here's a roster of the jobs:

*Question*:—"Would appreciate information *in re* how to find out the easiest way and occupation for a man who is used to indoor life to secure congenial work in some of the larger lumber-camps in California, Oregon or Washington. Where to write to, and what kind of light work could be had. Also regulation and customs of the camps, etc. Enclosed find stamps for reply."—B. B. LERBAK, Billings, Mont.

*Answer*, by Mr. Harriman:—In our coast lumber-camps the men live in shacks or cabins, four to a cabin usually. They eat in a big room in the commissary building. They buy anything they need at the company store in the camp.

They receive a good wage, and pay for their board out of their earnings. They are divided into gangs for each department of the work. Some keep the tracks of the logging-railway in repair and run

new lines as needed. The "donkey doctor" and his aids keep the donkey engines in repair. Also they attend to keeping up gasoline-pump engines for fire-fighting.

Usually one gasoline engine and pump stands within reach of the camp. One may be located beside an important trestle or bridge. In a camp that I visited two years ago they had five of these pumping-outfits.

The boss of the shingle-bolt end of the business has from four to six men getting out shingle bolts from waste scrap—split trees, short chunks left after logs have been cut, etc.

The rigging boss uses as many more in setting blocks for carrying a trip-line, setting up high-lead spars, guying-spars, anchoring engines.

The hook-tender has about eight men, hustling the heavy chokers and at the track, tending the strongback and yarding release.

Every line has its gangs of all kinds, and there may be four or five lines running from one camp. There are gangs of fellers who cut the trees. Gangs of buckers who cut them into lengths. Swampers who trim off limbs and clear the way for the yarding cable. There are "whistle-punks" to signal the engineer of the yarding engine, water-bucks who carry water to the men, and a cook and cookies to provide the grub, which is carried out at noon to the men in the field. A man to act as timekeeper, paymaster, bookkeeper and storekeeper, with a camp boss, makes up the rest.

There is no light work in camp, except the job of whistle-punk, unless it is that of general handy man for helping the cook.

### The Trumpeter

THERE are several varieties swimming the waters of Australia, Tasmania and New Zealand; all are said to be fine eating, but Mr. Goldie picks out the Hobart trumpeter for special mention:

*Question:*—"Will state my case first, so you may judge for yourself.

Am a commercial fisherman on the Mississippi River, and am thoroughly disgusted with the laws on commercial fishing and would like to try new fields—or waters, rather.

Am particularly interested in Tasmania, hearing that it is an ideal country to fish in, and as I understand commercial fishing, or rather the rudiments of it, would like to try it, once anyway; also understand that Tasmania is a pretty healthy sort of a place.

Would you kindly inform me a little on resources of the country in my line; or do you think it would not be worth the while? Here in this country a person has to be a lawyer, politician and a fisherman in order to be successful. A person can always make a good living here fishing, but that is not getting on.

Am single and foot-free—no strings of any kind on me—so it would be O. K. for me to try your country.

As you know, the distant fields look the greenest, so I imagine on the river here we average a fisherman to a mile. Two thousand miles of river means so many fishermen."—FRANK MARSHALL, Dakota, Minn.

*Answer*, by Mr. Goldie:—I think that a commercial fisherman with experience in such a hard school as yours should within a few years be able to build up a competency in Australia, and particularly in Tasmania, in which State you seem to be interested.

If you were settled in Hobart, the capital city of Tasmania, the land of lotus-eaters, and if you cast into the gorgeous blue waters that lap the shores of that settlement some real American fishing intelligence I think you ought to do remarkably well.

The waters around Tasmania are teeming with fish—and such fish! If you have never eaten a Hobart trumpeter you have not realized, as I have, that most breeds taste like blotting-paper by comparison. The trumpeter is the turkey of the waters and then some.

There is also much schnapper, rock cod, flathead and various other kinds of fish common to these waters.

Tasmania ought to be a much bigger exporter of fish than she is; but life has been very easy for Tasmanians, though they may not think so and would not admit it unless they had the experiences of a man who had to suffer the amount of competition which you have been up against.

Personally I love Tasmania. The people are about as care-free as you will find anywhere in the world, though they would appear to be very slow to a hustling Yank.

You are right in assuming that it is a healthy place. I do not know when Tasmanians die. I am inclined to think they are all waiting on for the millenium.

But as you are a single man you should be warned that Tasmanian girls bloom like their apples—rosy and luscious. It is a Garden of Eden to which you are turning your gaze, but if your lot is to be cast upon the waters you may be safe. I can not guarantee you. Anyway if you should meet with any disappointment of the character I have indicated you will be truly able to say when you are in Tasmania that there are as many fish in the sea as have ever been caught.

**Send question direct to expert in charge—NOT to the magazine.**

### Placering the Upper Stikine

IT LOOKS good to Mr. Carson, though results are not guaranteed:

*Question:*—"Am planning on going to British Columbia or Yukon Territory and would appreciate any information you can give me where I can find good placer mining. I figure on working for myself. Are there any places where a man can make wages washing gold?"—H. C. CARDELL, Logan, Mont.

*Answer*, by Mr. Carson:—The Omenica district of British Columbia is considered one of the most favorable locations for placer mining at present. There are quite a number of men who are making a living in that way. The ground is pockety, but from what I can learn you would stand as good a chance there as anywhere.

The upper Stikine has always appealed to me. Not that there has ever been anything remotely resembling a strike made there; but I have had a

hunch for years that some day there would be good placer discovered either on the main river or some of its tributaries. It is a splendid game and fish country and easy of access. A steamer runs from Vancouver or Seattle to Fort Wrangel, whence power-boats run up the river as far as Telegraph Creek. You can outfit at the creek with everything required, and the rest is up to you.

Of course you realize that I can not guarantee you a fortune by following my advice. If I was able to sit here and direct inquirers to valuable placer deposits I would not sit here ten minutes but would get out and do a little panning for the benefit of the Carson folks. All I can give you is an honest opinion of where you would stand a chance of striking something.

Write the Minister of Mines, Victoria, B. C., for last report on the mineral production of B. C. This will tell you the amounts obtained and what parts of the province they came from, and you might be able to line up a trip from them.

The Yukon is in my opinion a thing of the past. It costs so much to go in and the chances of success are so small that I would not advise tackling it.

### Scope for Small Capital in South Africa

HERE'S a little leaflet we just had printed up for Captain Franklin at his request:

The Union of South Africa has now been sufficiently tested and developed to be recommended.

Twenty years ago it imported nearly everything it used. Today it is self-supporting, producing the necessaries of life in great variety—maize, beef, mutton, bacon, eggs, butter, cheese, wool, cotton, sugar, tobacco, wine and fruit of every kind.

Of the men who foresaw the possibility of that development, and took a part in it, some no doubt failed, but most are now prosperous; many have enviable estates and incomes.

What they did, others may do. The opportunity is still there—indeed, today it is greater than ever, especially in agriculture. The Union needs men with sufficient capital to take an independent part in its development.

Such men will find South Africa worthy of their attention. It is a country with a great future. Land there is still cheap. Taxation is light. Living conditions are congenial.

Fuller particulars about positions and prospects may be obtained from The Manager, Publicity Dept., South African Railways and Harbours, Johannesburg, or the Publicity Agent (Section 32), Office of the High Commissioner for the Union of South Africa, 32, Victoria Street, London, S. W. 1.

### Machete-Makers

OFTEN as I've read about this interesting tool-instrument-weapon combined, it never once occurred to me to wonder where they come from. Now, thanks to Mr. Binda, one of our more recent additions to the "A. A." staff, we know:

*Question:*—Can you inform me where the tool or weapon known through South American countries as machete may be obtained? Also advise if possible which is the best company, should there be several companies from whom it may be possible to secure one.

The article I refer to is the one which, as a friend of mine who has traveled widely in South American countries puts it, 'is used for everything, from sharpening pencils to shaving.'"—C. R. ROLLINGS, Detroit, Mich.

*Answer*, by Mr. Binda:—The "machete" used in South American countries is manufactured in the United States by Collins & Company, 212 Water Street, New York, whose product is internationally known and with whom I would advise you to trade if you desire to secure any. I know they would be glad to send you their catalog upon request.

# LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

MCLAUGHLIN, STEWART H. Missing over nine years. Last heard from in 1912 in Michigan City, Indiana. Curly black hair. Was a blacksmith by trade, and also followed the automobile business. Any information will be appreciated.—Address MRS. HANNA MCLAUGHLIN, P. O., Carnegie, Pa.

TOLLY, FRANK. Was in Air Service during war. Stationed at Baltimore, Md., during July, 1918. Any information will be appreciated.—Address RAY C. WILCOX, 520 Voorhies St., Council Bluffs, Iowa.

**Please notify us at once when you have found your man.**

CLAPP FAMILY. Any descendant of Lodwick Clapp, Sr., who lived in Guilford Co., N. C., in 1790 to 1820, or Lodwick Clapp, Jr., who emigrated to Madison Co., Ala., in 1803, who knows anything of their ancestors, please communicate with a descendant of Lodwick, Jr.—Address CLARENCE B. ALBRITTON, care of Govt. Printing Office, Washington, D. C.

SCOTT, DAVID. Last letter received August 15, 1921, from Las Animas, Col. Traveling with a man named "Shorty." Please send any information to G. A. SCOTT, 4732 Wallingford St., Pittsburgh, Pa.

BLAINE, PEGGIE. Please write and enclose address. Have something I think will interest you.—Address LILY FIELDS, 203 Fair St., Trenton, N. J.

DU VALLE, ALVIN. Last heard of leaving Ontario for Montreal, October 7, 1915. Not heard from since. Any information will be appreciated by his sister.—Address HATTIE M. S. DU VALLE, P. O. Box 455, Walsenburg, Col.

"SHANGHAI" PRESSEY. Were on the beach together in Yokohama, Japan, July 1920. "Shanghai," remember your old pal "Sochu" Cleve and the Negeshi days? Please write to me.—JAMES CLEVE, care of Seamen's Institute, 58 Clay St., San Francisco, Cal.

McLAUREN, JOE. Last heard of in Fort Worth, Texas, last year. Five feet six inches tall, age eighteen. Any information as to his whereabouts will be appreciated.—Address PVT. DAVID J. ROBINSON, Co. D., 33 U. S. Inf., Ft. Clayton, C. Z.

McCULLOCK, MILAN C. Son of Dr. George McCullock of Huneston, Ia. Is a graduate of Ames Agr. College and Law Dept. of Chicago University. Last heard from was in Utica, December 20, 1919. Is a member of Delta Epsilon Fraternity of Ames, Ia. Age thirty-seven, five feet ten inches tall, weighs about 165 pounds. May be in Goldborn, Md., Buffalo, N. Y., or may be in Florida. Any information will be appreciated.—Address LUIGE RICCARDI, 223 Bank St., Newark, N. J.

JOHNSON, LAWRENCE. Any information as to his whereabouts will be appreciated by his aunt.—Address MRS. M. D. ATWOOD, 58 East 102nd St., New York City.

WEIMER, JACOB. Age fifty-three. Last heard of in New York City 1912. Any information as to his whereabouts will be appreciated by his mother.—Address MRS. E. WEIMER, 319 Oswego St. Syracuse, N. Y.

EARL, ALLEN. Sometimes known as Jack Earl. Age thirty, last heard of in France during war. Any information as to his whereabouts please write—Box 305, Berkeley, California.

NELSON, ADOLF. Five feet eight inches tall, blue eyes, grayish-black hair, light complexion, age about twenty-two. Worked on fishing boats around Sidney Inlet, B. C., and Seattle, Washington. Any information will be appreciated.—Address WALTER R. LUNDGREN, 534½ Thayer St., Rhinelander, Wis.

McLANE, C. A. Write me at once. Important news. Remember Headhunter.—Address HARLEY J. CAMPBELL, Minburn, Iowa.

**THE following have been inquired for in either the February 28th or March 10th issues of Adventure. They can get the names of the inquirers from this magazine:**

ADAMS, Harry C.; Ansell, Edward Clarence Trelawney; Brady, Frank J.; Browning, Robert F.; Burns, William; Dayve, Edward C.; de Yattos, Harry Burton; Fawkes, Harry K.; Gleason, John J.; Harriman, Robert Clayton; Herbert, N. A.; Jacques, Frank L.; Jones, Oscar; Kister, Norval L.; Laird, Lawrence Russell; Lewis, William J.; McCabe, Joe R.; Molewitz, William; Reynolds, Miss Kattie Agnes; Riffle, C. H.; Swann, Charlie; Todd, R. Hubert; Williams, Harry H.

MISCELLANEOUS—Any one who was in Militia Division Q. M. C. Base Hospital, Camp Jackson, S. C.; Co. 1, 3rd Batt. Engineers; F. W. D.; Men who served under Casomi in Central America and Lower Mexico, and boys who were with me in Cape Town, South Africa. Parents of George Caldwell.

**A LIST of unclaimed manuscripts will be published in the January 10th and July 10th issues of Adventure, and a list of unclaimed mail will be published in tue last issue of each month.**


# THE TRAIL AHEAD

## MARCH 30TH ISSUE

**Besides the new serial and the two complete novelettes mentioned on the second page of this issue the next *Adventure* will bring you the following stories:**

**THE LAND OF OPHIR A Three-Part Story Conclusion** — ***Charles Beadle***
When snake meets snake.

**THE COOK** — ***Frederick Moore***
A man of mystery in the ship's galley.

**THE SMILIN' KID** — ***John Joseph***
Uses his head.

**THE CROCODILE'S BRIDE** — ***Santie Sabalala***
A custom of the kraal people.

**INTUITION** — ***Henry Leverage***
Rats desert and *Blue Peter* deduces things.

**THE LEG OF MOOSE BILL** — ***Wilbur Watkins***
—Cheap at $30,000.

**HUNGER MAD** — ***F. St. Mars***
The eagles arrive last.

**HARRY BUSHNELL**
of Pennsylvania, in his spare time earns from $25 to $100 a week through magazine subscription work.

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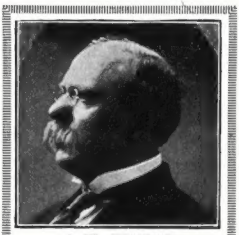

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of Nebraska, in odd hours has built up a steadily growing permanent income through magazine subscription work

THE new three-a-month *Adventure* has met with an overwhelmingly favorable response everywhere. A huge volume of subscriptions has been continually coming in to us direct during the past few months. Many of them must be from your own community. Readers, like yourself, who have regarded *Adventure* as their favorite magazine for many years, have become all the more firmly devoted to it. Many have shown their enthusiasm by renewing their subscriptions through us *months in advance.*

This great volume of orders that your neighbors are constantly sending to us, gives you an opportunity to develop and retain a permanent, satisfied following of subscribers. As our representative, you can accept subscriptions not only for *Adventure*, but for *The Delineator*, *The Designer* and *Everybody's Magazine* as well—four magazines in popular demand everywhere. In this way, you can *monopolize* all the magazine-purchasing homes in your community and assure yourself of a steadily growing substantial income, that will be limited solely by your own efforts.

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